THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF SAINT ISAAC THE SYRIAN

The Ascetical Homilies
of Saint Isaac the Syrian

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REVISED SECOND EDITION

Translated from the Greek and Syriac by the

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION MONASTERY

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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IN MEMORIAM

DR. MARIA KRIVOSHLIKOFF

OF BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

1922—2020

DEDICATION TO THE BLESSED

IERONYMOS THE CLAIRVOYANT

of Aegina (1883–1966)

Forsake not Isaac. Every day one page of Abba Isaac. Not more. Isaac is the mirror. There you will behold yourself. The mirror is so that we may see if we have any shortcoming, any smudge on our face, in order to remove it, to cleanse ourselves. If there is a smudge on your face or on your eyes, in the mirror you will detect it and will remove it. In Abba Isaac you will behold your thoughts, what they are thinking. Your feet, where they are going. Your eyes, if they have light and see. There you will find many sure and unerring ways, in order to be helped. One page of Isaac a day. In the morning or at night. Suffice it that you read a page.

AND VENERABLE ELDERS

JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST

of the Holy Mountain (1895–1959)

If all the writings of the desert fathers which teach us concerning watchfulness and prayer were lost and the writings of Abba Isaac the Syrian alone survived, they would suffice to teach one from beginning to end concerning the life of stillness and prayer. They are the Alpha and Omega of the life of watchfulness and interior prayer, and alone suffice to guide one from his first steps to perfection.

✢ SAINT ISAAC THE SYRIAN THE God-inspired ✢

✢ Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος ὁ Θεοπνευστος ✢

Dismissal Hymn
Plagal of First Tone. Let us worship the Word

He that thundered on Sinai with saving laws for man
hath also given thy writings as guides in prayer unto monks,
O revealer of unfathomable mysteries;
for having gone up in the mount
of the vision of the Lord, thou wast shown the many mansions.
Wherefore, O God-bearing Isaac,
entreat the Saviour for all praising thee.

Kontakion. Plagal of Fourth Tone
To thee, the Champion Leader

As an ascetic and God-bearer great in righteousness
and an instructor of monastics do we honour thee,
thou revealer of things sacred, and our protector.
But, O Isaac, since thou hast great boldness with the Lord,
intercede with Him for all of us who sing thy praise
and who cry to thee:
Rejoice, O Father most wise in God.

Megalynarion

From the depth of wisdom and godliness,
thou didst draw forth waters
springing up to eternal life.
Nurtured by this fountain
found in thy sacred writings,
O lofty-minded Isaac,
we taste of Christ God's grace.

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Foreword

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Summer and spring hast Thou fashioned.
Psalm 73:18

What the power of spring customarily does to the earth's nature, this grace also does to the soul through purity. The power of springtime causes even the delicate roots that grow in the valleys to sprout, warming the earth as a fire does a cauldron, so that it sends forth the treasures of verdure that God has planted in the earth's nature to gladden creation and for His own glory. In like manner grace causes the manifest blossoming of all the splendor that God has concealed in the soul's nature, and it shows this to her and causes her to rejoice in its beauty. [Saint Isaac, p. 554]

As the light breezes of springtime, as that gentle breeze wherein God spake to Elias at Horeb, so also are the Ascetical Homilies of Mar Isaac the Syrian to the thirsty soul which, like the psalmic hart, panteth after the living waters. Bitter winter is passed, and springtime has dawned which invigorates all creation, followed by summer wherein the fruit ripens and the crops are harvested. And even as the Lord has fashioned the natural seasons, so has He fashioned spiritual spring and summer wherein grace abounds like unto gentle showers, which drench the earth till she sprout forth all the good things which are unto life. In like manner our God and Fashioner, the Father of Lights, and our Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, the Spirit of Truth, has by the hand of Saint Abba Isaac, the vessel of election, given us this present volume of homilies as a springtime and summertime for our souls, unto 'the manifest blossoming of all the splendor that God has concealed in the soul's nature' and that we might 'rejoice in its beauty.'

3 Kgs. 19:12

For many centuries now this holy book, in manuscript and in printed form, has been a guide to monastics. It was written primarily for hermits and inhabitants of the desert who dwell in stillness. In the words of Saint Isaac himself, the aim and purpose of these homilies and instructions is that one may

> learn what is the life of stillness, what is its work, what mysteries are concealed in this discipline, mysteries that are hidden from many, but after the discovery of which strenuous men run, seeking to attain them in stillness, and why some men belittle the righteousness that is practised in the society of men and prefer to it the tribulations and struggles of a silent and solitary abode. From the understanding of these things and because of what they find in this epistle, men will call blessed the solitaries who pass their lives in this world by remaining concentrated and by themselves. But to those who have no acquaintance with these matters this instruction, with all its admonitions, about the stages that are in stillness will be superfluous. I write here to wise men, and I offer advice with love. [pp. 463–64]

Since the primary purpose of this book is the instruction of those in the desert, one may rightly ask why the great labor and cost in translating and printing such a work was undertaken, since there are so few, if any, desert-dwellers and workers of stillness in the world today? The answer can be found in *The Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, who writes: 'Angels are a light for monks, and the monastic life is a light for all men' (Step 26:31). Thus, both monastics living in cenobia (monasteries of communal life and rule) and lay people can glean words of instruction for salvation from those living the angelic life in stillness.

In Homily 23 of the present volume we meet with this amazing statement:

> Just as among ten thousand men scarcely one will be found who has fulfilled the commandments and what pertains to the Law with but a small deficiency, and who has attained to limpid purity of soul, so only one man among thousands will be found who after much vigilance has been accounted worthy to attain to pure prayer, and to break through that boundary, and gain experience of that mystery. Indeed, the majority of men have in no wise been deemed worthy of pure prayer, but only a very few. But as to that mystery which is after

> pure prayer and lies beyond it, there is scarcely to be found a single man from generation to generation who by God's grace has attained thereto. [p. 240]

One may again ask, why even write a whole book concerning stillness and 'pure prayer' and 'that which lies beyond it' if only 'one man among thousands' ever attains to it and 'there is scarcely to be found a single man from generation to generation who by God's grace' enters into 'that which lies beyond it'? Or again, why labor to read such a book if so very few ever in fact accomplish its purpose? It is evident that in the Scriptures and God-inspired writings many exalted and heroic states are described, not in order to dismay us or cause us to despair, but in order to awaken in us a holy desire for that which is written and to spur us on from 'strength to strength,' from 'glory to glory.' Furthermore, a means is offered to us by which to measure ourselves and see how wanting we still are in our spiritual endeavors, thereby safeguarding us from becoming complacent and satisfied in our weak and meager struggles. Such writings humble us and demonstrate to us how lacking we are in the spiritual realm. They are most sobering. Saint John of the Ladder says it beautifully:

> A horse when alone often imagines that it is galloping, but when it is with others it finds out how slow it is. [Step 25:21]

Saint Abba Isaac writes from experience. That is why his words have such strength. There is nothing abstract about his teaching, as in the writings of the vain philosophers and disputers of every generation. He writes concerning the life of stillness which he lived himself, and from what he heard from others who lived the same life: observations and conclusions drawn from experience.

He bears witness to this fact on many occasions in his writings. Here are a few:

> These things I have written down as a reminder and source of profit for myself, and for every man who comes upon this book, according to what I have understood from both the divine vision of the Scriptures and from true mouths, and a little from experience itself, in order that they might be a help to me through the prayers of those who are profited by them. For I have taken no little trouble to set these things down. [p. 202]

> My beloved, I have become foolish, and I cannot bear to guard the mystery in silence, but I am become a fool for the sake of the profit of my brethren. For true love is not able to tarry in any mystery without her beloved. Often when I was writing these things my fingers failed me in setting down everything on paper, and they were unable to endure the sweetness that descended into my heart and silenced my senses. [p. 438]

> Because I have found you determined to run the course of abiding in stillness with exacting discipline, I have taken the concise sense of the words I heard from discerning men about the work of stillness and combined it with my own first-hand experience of these things. This I shall imprint in your memory with this short writing; and you, on your part, will help yourself by this epistle if you read it with your accustomed zeal. For you will not approach the reading of the sayings gathered in our epistle as some ordinary reading, but with the understanding of wisdom, and you will receive it as a light for your other reading because of the great power hidden in it. [p. 463]

In reading the homilies, one will be struck by the absolute, if not extreme, nature of the teaching of Saint Isaac concerning the life of stillness. Outside of the wilderness and practice of silence (*hesychia*) he allows little hope of ever being free from the passions and beholding the face of God. He writes:

> No one can draw nigh to God save the man who has separated himself from the world. [p. 113]

> This is virtue: that in his mind a man should be unoccupied with the world. As long as the senses have dealings with external things, the heart cannot have rest from imaginations about them. Outside of the desert and solitude, the bodily passions do not abate, nor do evil thoughts cease. [pp. 113–14]

> Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world's starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. [p. 144]

> O, how evil for hesychasts is the sight of men and intercourse with them! And in very truth, my brethren, association with those who have relaxed stillness is especially harmful. For just as the sudden blast of ice, falling on the buds of the fruit-trees, nips and destroys

them, so too, contacts with men, even though they be quite brief and (to all appearance) made for good purpose, wither the bloom of virtue – newly flowering in the temperate air of stillness – which covers with softness and delicacy the fruit-tree of the soul planted by the streams of the waters of repentance. And just as the bitterness of the frost, seizing upon new shoots, consumes them, so too does conversation with men seize upon the root of a mind that has begun to sprout the tender blades of the virtues. And if the talk of those who have controlled themselves in one particular, but who in another have minor faults, is apt to harm the soul, how much more will the chatter and sight of ignoramuses and fools (not to say of laymen)? [p. 220]

The sight of worldly people causes confusion in the soul that has renounced them for the sake of divine work. Continuous intercourse even with spiritual brothers causes harm, while the mere sight of worldly men from a distance causes the same. [p. 369]

There is a short homily, number forty-five, which is an answer of Abba Isaac to his 'natural and spiritual brother' as the title tells us, who entreated the saint by letters to come and visit him. In it he sets forth many arguments why those in stillness should not 'without necessity' ever go forth under any pretext from their stillness. He accordingly declines his brother's request, demonstrating how harmful it would be to him.

One almost despairs in reading such passages, of which there is an abundance throughout the book. In order, therefore, not to be confused in one's thoughts, one should keep in mind that Saint Isaac is writing primarily for hesychasts (workers of stillness). He accordingly produces arguments to fortify the heart and mind of those who dwell in stillness, answering any thoughts which might deter one from this way of life. Saint John Climacus similarly produces arguments to bolster and encourage those living the communal life in monasteries, singing the praises of the cenobia. Saint Isaac, being a desert-dweller, praises the desert. Now there is not a contradiction here – each has its place. For there is a hierarchy in the modes of the monastic life as there is of the virtues.

During the Golden Age of Palestinian monasticism in the sixth century, Saint Sabbas the Sanctified was appointed by the Patriarch of

Jerusalem as archimandrite over the hermits and desert-dwellers, and Saint Theodosius as archimandrite over those who dwelt in monasteries, hence his title Cenobiarch. And whereas these two great monastic fathers did not leave us any of their teachings in writing, Saints John Climacus and Isaac the Syrian left us their God-inspired books, the former for the cenobia and the latter for the desert-dwellers. There is no doubt that the life of the desert is superior to that of the cenobia, and it is so honored in the Church. Even Saint John Climacus recognizes this in his homily 'On Holy Stillness of Body and Soul' (Step 27), having himself been a worker of stillness for over forty years in the desert prior to his becoming abbot of Sinai.

If the reader, therefore, keeps in mind the purpose of the homilies (in Homily 37 he writes, 'Our discourse, however, is concerning anchorites') and the mind of the saint concerning the life of stillness, he will be better able to understand and appreciate his instructions, no matter how austere they may seem to be. Another Church Father in the tenth century, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, writing on the spiritual life, was also very absolute and demanding of his followers – unrelenting and uncompromising in the things which pertained to the Spirit. For this reason he became involved in difficulties with the ecclesiastical authorities of his day who thought him extreme, to say the least, and exacting beyond measure in dealing with the faithful.

Saint Isaac was a most daring and bold hoplite of the Lord, who loved God with all his strength and entire being. He demanded the same heroism of his hearers. He writes:

> When you wish to begin one of the works of God, first make a testament, like one who is no longer to live in this life, like a man who is prepared for death and has despaired of his present life, and as though you have reached your fore-appointed time. [p. 179]

> When you desire to pursue some beautiful work for the love of God, put death as the limit of your desire. [p. 442]

> Nothing is stronger than desperation. It knows no defeat at the hand of any, whether they be on the right, or on the left. When in his mind a man cuts away any hope for his life, nothing can equal him in daring. None of his foes is able to face him, and there is no affliction the rumor of which makes his purpose weaken; for every affliction

> which may befall him is lighter than death, whereas he has bowed his head to receive precisely this. [p. 504]

His was not the 'social gospel' which is so much in vogue today among those separated from true Christianity. Saint Isaac wrote for Mary who chose the 'good part' by sitting at the feet of the Saviour. He understood well our Saviour's word, 'Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.' Luke 10:41–42

And verily, this is the true understanding of the Gospels and the example which our Saviour has given us therein. For the Lord did not take part in the political and social movements of His day. Rather, He went about Judea, Samaria, and Galilee teaching the 'one thing needful,' to repent and seek first the Kingdom of the Heavens. As God become man He took compassion upon the people, healing their every malady and illness both of soul and body, and withdrew often, even from His disciples, to pray whole nights and days at length, thereby teaching us by His holy example to draw apart and pray alone. He did not take any part in the political trends of the day, either on behalf of the aspirations of the Hebrews for a 'Jewish state' or of the Romans who were the ruling force of the time. Rather, He taught us to 'render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's,' that His Kingdom is not of this world, that here we have no abiding city, but we seek the one to come, that our citizenship is in the Heavens. Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35 Matt. 22:21 John 18:36 Heb. 13:14 Phil. 3:20

Once when one approached Him saying, 'Teacher, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me,' He answered, 'Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?' But nowadays many 'priests' and 'monastics' wish to judge and divide both in the political and social spheres of society. We find the former spirit and understanding of the Gospels in the Acts of the Apostles when 'there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.' It is recorded: Luke 12:13–14

> Then the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men

> attested to, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this need. But we will persevere in prayer, and in the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, an Antiochean proselyte. [Acts 6:2–5]

This, then, is the mind of the Church. There is a hierarchy and order of precedence in all things, and things primary do not become secondary. Each, therefore, as he has been ordained and has vowed should perform his liturgy as a good and faithful steward – the clergy in their respective offices, the monastics in prayer and obedience to what they have vowed at their tonsure, and the lay people in the keeping of the commandments and what they vowed at baptism.

Understanding this order of precedence clearly, Saint Abba Isaac calls the monastics, and the hermits in particular, to vigilance against thoughts which might deflect them from their original goal and purpose. He writes:

> Once a certain brother was reproached that he should distribute what he had, but unabashed he replied boldly to him that found fault: 'Monks are not obliged to give alms, for it is the monk who can say to Christ with an unveiled face as it is written, "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee." He it is that possesses nothing upon the earth, who earns nothing for himself among material things, who in his mind clings to nothing visible, nor endeavors to acquire anything; if someone should give him something, he takes only what he has need of, but he seeks nothing beyond this and he is like a bird in his way of life. Such a man is not obliged to give alms, because he has a work superior to almsgiving. Indeed, how could he give to another that of which he has been liberated?' [p. 231]

> One of the saints said: 'It does not befit the rule of your manner of life to feed the starving and to make your cell a hospice, for this is the laymen's portion and it is meet for them to practise this as something good, but not for anchorites, who are liberated from care for visible things, and keep guard on their minds through prayer.' [p. 409]

Yet the careful reader will also note that the saint is conscious that not all are able to 'receive this word' (cf. Matt. 19:12). Lest, therefore, anyone should despair, he observes:

Who is the man that, hearing this, will desire outward righteousness, save only he that is unable to persevere in stillness? Yet if there be someone who cannot practise stillness – since it is the grace of God that brings a man within the door – let him not forsake the other way, lest by so doing he have no share in either of the paths of life. [p. 153]

But when I say these things, I do not mean to banish hope, as though only those who have attained to the most sublime perfection can be accounted worthy of God's grace and find consolation. For in very truth, when a man disdains evil actions and separates himself from them entirely and clings to the good, he will quickly sense divine aid. And if he struggle a little, he will find comfort for his soul, he will gain the remission of his sins, he will be deemed worthy of grace and will receive a multitude of blessings. [pp. 153–54]

The man, however, who is distracted with matters of this life, who works with his own hands and receives from others, should give alms. To neglect this is manifest opposition to the Lord's commandment. If a man does not draw near to God in hidden ways, and he neither knows how to serve God in spirit, nor concerns himself with manifest actions which are within his power, on what does he place his hope to gain life? Such a man is foolish. [p. 231]

Therefore, as I said, let a merciful heart preside over your entire discipline, and you will be at peace with God. [p. 456]

But lo, the majority of men do not attain such innocency, yet we hope that for their good deeds a portion is reserved for them in the Kingdom of the Heavens. This can be ascertained from the understanding of the Beatitudes of the Gospel, which He stated differently in order to make known to us the many variations in the diverse modes of life within these same Beatitudes. For in all the measures of every way upon which each man journeys to Him, God opens before him the gate of the Kingdom of the Heavens. [p. 501]

But if we are destitute of this all-embracing portion, let us fill up its lack by the commandment that follows it, which is visible *praxis*. [p. 531]

But again he draws our attention to the original purpose of the workers of stillness:

If you make poverty a rule for your soul and, by God's grace, you are freed from cares, and by your poverty you are exalted above this

world, then beware, lest you become enamored of possessions under the pretext of almsgiving due to your love for the poor, and thus, by taking from one man in order to give to another, you put your soul in turmoil once again, and efface your honor by subjection to men while begging from them, and lose the freedom and nobility of your mind through your concern for matters of this life. For your station is higher than that of the almsgiver. [p. 151]

Yet such a one is found inferior when compared to the perfection of the man who has banished himself from the world and has found within his soul the mystery of that blessedness which is of the future age, and has laid hold of that thing for which Christ came. [p. 154]

I have said these things, my brother, not so that we should neglect and despise the work of stillness; for in every place we exhort you to this work, and we do not now oppose what we have said elsewhere. Let no one take hold of, and bring forth out of context, a statement from our words and leave the rest, senselessly clutching that alone in his hands. I recall that in many places I have said with entreaty that even if it should happen that a man is totally idle in his cell by reason of the constraint of illness (which is wont to befall us), he should not for this cause think that a complete departure from his cell and works performed outside of it are superior to his idleness within his cell. But by a complete departure I do not refer to the circumstance when a necessity arises, causing you to depart from your cell for several weeks in order to purchase what is required for the consolation and life of your neighbor; do not judge this to be idleness and a waste of time. But if a man thinks that he is perfect and above everything of this life because of his continuance with God and his withdrawal from all visible labors, then with reason he may also refrain from these things. Great is the work of discernment practised by those whom God helps! [pp. 532–33]

Saint Isaac would wish that none of the anchorites and hermits would make any concern outside of prayer and stillness their 'principal work and put the work of God in second place' (p. 549). The following passage best exemplifies his mind concerning what is greater and what lesser in the pursuits of a monk in the spiritual life, while yet making concession for those who are not able to abide by the former.

> A virtue that a man performs in behalf of other men cannot purify the soul; still it is reckoned before God for the receiving of a reward for labor. A virtue that a man performs within himself, however, accomplishes both: it is reckoned for the receiving of recompense, and it produces purity. For this reason, separate yourself from the first [*mode of virtue*] by pursuing the second. If a man takes no concern for the latter and desists from the former, he suffers a manifest fall away from God. The second, however, can entirely fill the place of the first, without the first being performed at all. [p. 370]

> The man who is conscious of his sins is greater than he who profits the whole world by the sight of his countenance. The man who sighs over his soul for but one hour is greater than he who raises the dead by his prayer while dwelling amid many men. The man who is deemed worthy to see himself is greater than he who is deemed worthy to see the angels, for the latter has communion through his bodily eyes, but the former through the eyes of his soul. The man who follows Christ in solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregations of men. Let no one object here, citing what was said by the Apostle, 'I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren.' He who has received the power of Paul is enjoined to do this. But Paul was guided by the nod that was made to him so that he should profit the whole world, as he himself bore witness, for he did not do this of his own will. 'For necessity is laid upon me,' he says, 'yea, woe unto, me if I preach not the Gospel.' And the election of Paul had in view not the course of his own repentance, but the preaching of the Gospel to mankind, and he received superabundant power. [pp. 461–62]

Who can gainsay the above and all the other sayings of the holy father? If we are sincere, then we will acknowledge the truth contained in them.

How far have we that are monastics departed from this understanding in these latter days, and become self-called teachers, writers, missionaries, charismatics, etc. One beholds in the Western part of the world monastics attending movies and writing reviews 'for the edification of the faithful,' bishops and monastics teaching full time in secular institutions as monk-scholars in imitation of the Latin scholastic tradition. Elsewhere we read of cantatas played in deserts

and abodes of prayer. We are told, 'We must learn again what beauty is. We must learn what it is to be carried on the thunder of a fugue, to be engulfed in the madness of Lear, to be consumed with the sanity of Quixote. We need to be refreshed by the health and charity of Dickens, illumined by the clarity and perception of Hugo, ballasted by the sober gravity and sidelong wit of Johnson, touched by the fire of Donne, soothed by Chaucer's flowering springtime.' And this from monastic lips.

It seems some have become zealous to imitate the different orders (teaching, nursing, missionary, etc.) of the Roman Catholic communion. Just of late we read of an Orthodox nun given permission by her convent in the United States to work as a social worker in her former parish.

And if these were only the actions of converts and monastics in the West it would be somewhat understandable, even if not justifiable, since for some time now this has been the trend in this part of the world, and it is possible that converts may bring some of their former ways of thinking as baggage with them, thinking to 'convert' them for the profit of the faithful. But we see and hear of similar and worse situations in the Orthodox homelands. Thus, an Anglican visiting the Soviet Union some years ago described his stay at a monastery in the south of that country where the monks were fond of playing live concerts of secular music for their guests and inviting them for a swim in the sea.

Once our abbot related to us that during a visit to the Convent of the Annunciation in London, England, a monk appeared during the Saturday night vigil and asked to speak with him, adding that he had come to London especially to meet him. Our abbot told him that he could speak with him the next day where he was staying. The monk came, and to our abbot's surprise, he heard that the monastic was from one of the leading monasteries of the Holy Mountain. Upon inquiring what his purpose was in England, our abbot to his dismay heard that the father had come to study one of the Church Fathers at a leading university of the country. 'Really,' said our father, 'you came from the Holy Mountain to England to study the Church Fathers? Have you never read Saint Isaac the Syrian on the three degrees of knowledge?' Having received an answer in the negative, our

abbot began from memory to relate to him the three different ways of knowledge from the homilies of Saint Isaac. The monk was delighted and affirmed that he had never heard or read such things. Whereupon, our abbot told him, 'Have you never read in Saint Basil how he mourned the "years of futility" which he spent at the University of Athens before his baptism and tonsure, and that if he could live his life again he would not repeat this aspect, but rather imitate his blessed sister Saint Macrina and retire to the desert from an early age? Dear Father, in the university you will learn *about* God, but if you would stay on the Holy Mountain in your cell and pray unceasingly, you would come to *know* God the All-wise and Creator Himself, let alone the Church Fathers.'

It never occurs to many of these otherwise sincere and dedicated monastics that to whatever one gives his first energies and most of his time, *that* he or she is, foremost and primarily, and not a monastic, which necessarily takes second place, if any place at all. A bishop or priest who spends most of his waking hours preparing and giving lectures is at the most a lecturer and educator, and not that for which he was ordained. When some would ask the saintly Papa Nicholas Planas (+1932) of Athens, Greece, why he spent so many hours in church (he was referred to by the faithful as 'Saint Vigil' because of his continual vigils) he would answer them by asking how many hours they spent each day at their work. 'I am a priest,' he would say with his wonted simplicity, 'therefore my place is in church before the altar.'

There seems to be total confusion today as far as spiritual values and priorities and even terminology is concerned. That blessed man Photios Kontoglou (+1966) used to point out that, because of misuse, words do not have the same meaning today as they had for many centuries before. People call things by the wrong name. For example, in Greece today if one refers to a person as a 'spiritual man' (*pneumatikos anthropos*) it means that he is well-educated and refined, one well-versed in and appreciative of music, poetry, literature, the theater, opera, etc. – in short, a cultured man. Yet, from the time of the preaching of the Apostles in Greece until relatively recent times, this designation, 'spiritual man,' meant a person given over to the pursuit of things heavenly and spiritual, one well-versed in Sacred

Scripture and the things of the Spirit. Since the advent of 'atheist letters' (secular education) which supplanted the 'sacred letters,' society has reverted to paganism and there has been a confusion of terms. Thus, people today call certain things spiritual which are anything but spiritual, in all actuality are opposed to the Spirit, whereas things truly spiritual are considered as bizarre and strange if not downright foolish and insane.

In such a context, the value of writings such as those of Saint Isaac can never be overestimated. For from the heart and mind of one purified and illumined in the Holy Spirit, from one resurrected already in the new creation, we have the spiritual priorities and values indicated and expounded to us unerringly.

We mentioned above the homilies of Saint Isaac on the three degrees of knowledge (Homilies 52 and 53 of the present volume). Nowhere in so few words has a Church Father expounded so lucidly and concisely our understanding as Christians of knowledge (contranatural, natural, and supranatural) as in these two homilies. They are unsurpassed. These two homilies alone justify many times over the translation and publishing of the present book. Yet there are other homilies of which the same can be said, so precious and indispensable are they in instructing us and encouraging us in the darkness of this age. Homily 29, entitled 'On the Example and Similitude Furnished by a Divine Vision Concerning the Lord's Day and the Sabbath' is another such homily which makes the translation, printing, and reading of the book of Saint Isaac most worthwhile.

The comments of Saint Isaac on fasting (as on pages 299–300), on tears (on pages 302–3), and his explanation of the 'many mansions' mentioned by our Saviour in John 14:2 (on page 172) are but some of the many pearls found in this book. Yet what can one say concerning his comments on hope? Can one ever sufficiently sing the praises of the Abba on this account? Even though one may despair because of his absolute insistence on the desert and stillness in order to be freed of the passions, yet his utterances on hope are gems rarely to be encountered. Behold a few:

> But if each day his ship be broken up and his cargo perish in the deep, let him not cease from acquiring new possessions, trading, and also from borrowing; let him set out in other ships, sailing in hope,

> until the Lord, beholding his struggle and taking compassion on his ruin, sends down upon him His mercy and gives him powerful motivations to enable him to undergo and resist the flaming darts of the enemy. [pp. 190–91]

> As a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of all flesh in comparison with the mind of God. And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures. [p. 379]

And observing God's patience, long-suffering, kindness, mercy, and compassion as regards our sins, he exclaims:

> Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. [p. 387]

Dear readers, the love for Abba Isaac was instilled in our father, the founder of our monastery, by his father and elder, Joseph the Cave-dweller and Hesychast of the Holy Mountain (+1959) and the great elder and worker of interior prayer, Ieronymos the Cappadocian of Aegina (+1966). He in turn instilled the same love in us. On many occasions he has related to us how the Elder Joseph, during his years of great struggles in the desert of Athos, always carried in his bosom a copy of the first printed Greek edition of Abba Isaac by Nikephoros Theotokis, and that later when the *synodia* settled in New Skete, he made sure that each cell (there were four houses of the *synodia* – one in the skete and three outside the skete on the cliffs above the sea) had its own copy.

So great was the love of Abba Isaac instilled in our abbot, and the understanding that his writings are indispensable for the monastic life, that early in his monastic life he obtained a copy, before his return to the United States in 1958. Even in Greece, copies of the 1770 Nikephoros Theotokis edition are indeed quite rare, but by Divine Providence our abbot, then a young monk, found a copy in a monastery on Mount Taygetus of the Peloponnesus above the city of Kalamata. The monastery had been damaged in the civil war between the Communist partisans and the Nationalist forces after the end of the German occupation of 1940–45. Hostages of the Communists, both clergy and leading citizens of the area, were tortured and put to death at the monastery, and a large part of the buildings perished in a fire.

Thus, the whole library went up in flames, as did the cells of the monastics. The church and guest quarters were the only buildings which survived. In the *archondariki* of the guest quarters two books were found which apparently had been borrowed from the library and were being read by a guest, and consequently were saved from the fire. One was the commentaries on the Four Gospels of Bishop Theophylact of Bulgaria, and the other was the writings of Saint Isaac the Syrian. Father, therefore, pleaded with the Mother Superior of the Convent of Saints Constantine and Helen in Kalamata, of which the monastery on Mount Taygetus had become a dependency, to obtain the book of Abba Isaac. She did not wish to give it, but father entreated her with tears, pointing out to her that many of the sisters could not read, and that even those who could were not able to read this book since it was in an antiquated script used in Europe for Greek printing in the eighteenth century. The Mother Superior, who was also our father's aunt, finally relented, and to his great joy he came back to the New World with this precious volume, literally carrying it on himself in a peasant knapsack in which he kept holy things, and sleeping with it under his pillow during his voyage by ship across the great ocean.

Thus it was that from the beginning our father had Saint Abba Isaac as a companion in his monastic life, and when the community was first started in the early sixties, he was able to teach us from these blessed writings. So greatly did our father esteem this book that every time one joined the community who had a good command of the Greek language, he pleaded with him, if at all possible, to translate the book into English for the benefit of many. In this manner several attempts were made, which alas, came to nothing because of the many problems and difficulties involved in the translation. Finally, a young man joined the brotherhood who, seeing the great longing which our father had for an English translation, accepted the obedience to undertake it.

After many years of labors, trials, and temptations, of working on it during the hours which could be spared from our prayer life and the obediences by which we support ourselves, a typed manuscript in English was completed. But in reading it our abbot noticed that at certain places it did not make any sense. Neither the Greek editions

nor the various Greek manuscripts which we obtained in microfilm, nor the Slavonic and Russian editions were able to help us in these difficult passages. It is true that some of the passages were cleared up by the manuscripts, and one could see where there had been a copyist's mistake or a misprint in the printed editions, but there were instances which still remained unresolved. The Slavonic and Russian translations were made so literally from the Greek translation that all the problems and ambiguities in the Greek had been faithfully rendered in the Russian.

Our abbot was so grieved over the numerous unresolved passages that he despaired of the manuscript ever being printed in English, since a faulty text would be a disservice to the faithful. Seeing our abbot's sorrow, the translator came one day and asked for a blessing to learn Syriac, in the hope that the difficulties with the Greek translation might be resolved by looking at the original text. At first, our abbot hesitated, because of the time and difficulty involved in learning a new language, but finally he gave his blessing.

Blessed and happy was the day on which the father asked and the abbot blessed him to learn Syriac, for not only were the difficulties in the Greek translation cleared up, and in addition, untranslated passages, sections, and whole homilies translated (as one can see in the present volume), but a whole world – a beautiful world of homilies and texts, unknown and untranslated before into any language, by Saints Ephraim and Isaac the Syrians, Mar Jacob of Serugh, and other known and anonymous Syriac writers – was opened unto us. It was as if a secret and sealed well-spring of living water drawn up unto eternal life was opened for us. Hence, the undertaking of the translation of Abba Isaac into English has become such a blessing for us, that we shall never be able to ever thank our Saviour – may His holy Name be blessed – and Saint Isaac sufficiently for the joy and delight which we have found through these treasures translated from the Syriac. We pray that in the future we shall be deemed worthy to share these treasures through the publication of several volumes of translations from Syriac.

In the course of his working with Syriac, the father involved encountered certain difficulties, and asked for a blessing to write to Professor Sebastian Brock of Oxford, England, a foremost English-

speaking Syriac scholar, requesting his help and advice. Our abbot blessed, and we received a most gracious and encouraging reply from Professor Brock, who was delighted that someone was interested in Syriac and who offered his kind and continuous assistance. To our great delight, he informed us of a forthcoming visit to our area since he had relatives living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Since then his visits have been almost annual, and his friendship and assistance have been inestimable. Truly marvellous is God in His ways, and no word sufficeth to hymn His wonders.

Know, dear readers, that the completion of this work has been through the prayers and support of our three monastic communities, two in the United States and one in Greece, and of many friends of the monastery throughout the world.

At the end of the first edition of the Ascetical Homilies we appended a short but comprehensive history of the Persian Church, of which so little is known in the English-speaking world. The history included the period of the lifetime of Saint Isaac. The purpose of this was to demonstrate that Saint Abba Isaac was not a Nestorian, as is commonly held in the West. For those of us who are Orthodox Christians there is no problem. The memory of the Church informs us that Abba Isaac is numbered among the saints, and he is celebrated in the Church calendar as such. In the Greek and Russian editions of the writings of Saint Isaac, no need was felt to demonstrate this fact since no one ever doubted it. It is in the English-speaking world that this has become a problem for some, and since, alas, even some Orthodox, who should know better, repeat the allegation that Saint Isaac was a Nestorian bishop, we took the time and effort to demonstrate that at the time of Saint Isaac one cannot claim historically that the Persian Church was 'Nestorian' in the doctrinal sense of the term. Independent of all such considerations, however, there is nothing in the writings of the saint – may his blessing be upon us – which contains the condemned Christological doctrines of Nestorianism or any of the other heretical teachings of the time. We have not included this history in the present edition for the sake of brevity. Should anyone wish a copy he may request it from us.

We rejoice in being able to offer the present translation to the English-speaking world, and have taken great pains to render a transla-

tion to the best of our ability, conscious that English today is widely known and used, even as Greek was throughout the Roman Empire in the days of our Saviour and the Holy Apostles. Although as monastics our 'principal work,' to use an expression of Saint Isaac, is not translations and publications, but rather the 'art of arts and science of sciences,' which is prayer and the love of God, yet if our community by its existence had not been able to offer anything else but the present translation, we would consider the purpose of our existence as a native Orthodox monastic community in the West to have been fulfilled. So great is the importance which we attach to this present volume in the spiritual life of the Church.

In a way, this offering by our community of the Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian is a debt owed to the saint, for without him we may well have not existed as a monastery today. Let us explain. When our elder and abbot, Father Panteleimon, returned to the States as a young monk in the summer of 1958, he found church life in the Greek-speaking communities in turmoil, for Archbishop Michael, the primate of the Greek Church in the United States, reposed three days after our abbot's arrival.

Seeing that the spiritual climate in the Archdiocese was not conducive to monasticism, father decided within a few weeks that it would be best for him to return to the Holy Mountain. A few months later, in the fall of 1958, he came to Boston in order to find means to return. Through the Providence of God he never left, and in a few years' time the monastery was founded.

Had it not been for the writings of Saint Isaac, as he himself has often related, in those first years before the existence of the monastic community (1958–62), he does not think that he would have survived as a monastic, for great was the pressure exerted upon him by the hierarchy to abandon his monastic calling – to shave and dress in secular clothes and seek an ecclesiastical career in the Church. If he survived in the midst of these pressures and enticements, therefore, it was primarily because of the grace of our true God and the prayers and admonitions and luminous examples of the Elders Joseph and Ieronymos, and especially because of the writings of Saint Isaac, which were his inseparable companion by day and by night.

Here is how he describes that period himself: 'Those years were

long and difficult. There were times when I was in utter poverty and did not even have a nickel to buy a stamp and post a letter. On top of it all, the clergy would tell me that I was a fool in persisting to be a monk. "Monasticism is past," they would tell me; "become a deacon, become a priest and work in the world. There will never be a monastery." But I would not agree with them. My sorrow was great. There was no one I could speak to who would understand me and encourage me. It was during those difficult years that I would sometimes look in a mirror just to see someone dressed as a monastic and say, "Bless, my father." For consolation I would translate lives of ascetics and martyrs and pray with tears. It is then that the lives of Abba Mark the Ascetic and Anchorite of Athens and Saint George of Kratovo, the New Martyr, were translated. What to do? Since I could not speak with anyone close by, I began to read Abba Isaac the Syrian. Every night, without fail, I would open that blessed book and read. What a consolation that became, what a delight. And what a marvellous thing happened then. Whatever questions had arisen during the day I would find answered by the reading at night. And this was not just once or twice or a few times – but daily for some months. And what was marvellous is that I did not read at random, opening the book here and there, but rather continued the next night where I had left off the night before. Yet, without fail, the questions of each day would be answered in the reading each night. It was like going to a living elder and saying one's thoughts. I think the Lord did this since there was no elder to whom I could go at the time. It was during this difficult time that Saint Abba Isaac became a living presence for me and I came to look upon him as my own abba. Such was the living bond which was forged at that time with the saint and which has not ceased till the present. I do not think that I would have survived as a monastic in those years without Saint Isaac.'

And after the founding of the monastery, it was Saint Abba Isaac who was quoted again and again during the formative years of the community. And furthermore, if we have the *typicon* which we have in the monastery, which provides many hours for quiet time to pray and read, this is due to Saint Abba Isaac and his admonitions. The choice of the work by which we support ourselves and other details of our daily life are all the outcome of the teachings and instructions

of Saint Abba Isaac, trying to apply them in our context, since we are not in the desert. As an example, the work which we do is such that it is conducive to mental quietness and we can close shop at any time and go to our cells for quiet hours, as well as attend all the appointed church services. Therefore, as a monastic community, our debt to Saint Isaac is inestimable. Wherefore we truly owed it to the saint to translate and publish his writings as a small token of appreciation and thanksgiving.

The present volume is appropriately dedicated to the two great elders and pillars of our *synodia*, Joseph the Hesychast of the Holy Mountain and Ieronymos the clairvoyant of Aegina, for both of them loved us greatly and instructed us by their example and admonitions. The Elder Joseph we did not know personally. He was the elder of our spiritual father and abbot, and it was with his blessings that the monastery was founded here in Boston. He was an amazing man with evident gifts of the Holy Spirit. Most of his life was spent in great labors and pains while struggling in the desert parts of the Holy Mountain. He reposed on the feast of the Dormition of the Holy Theotokos, the fifteenth of August, at his hermitage of the Annunciation of the Theotokos outside of New Skete of the Monastery of Saint Paul. Although we did not know him in person, yet we feel that we know him in spirit, even as we know and feel the presence of the saints in the Holy Church. We have heard so many things about him from our own spiritual father who knew him, that we feel as if we have lived together, and truly his presence is felt many times in our community.

As for the great elder Ieronymos the clairvoyant who was from Cappadocia of Asia Minor and lived as a hesychast in his hermitage of the Annunciation on the island of Aegina, our spiritual father knew him well, and some of the senior fathers of our *synodia* had also met him during a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain and Greece in 1963. He was a wondrous man with many gifts of the Holy Spirit, and was a great support and guide to our brotherhood during its formative years. He gifted his walking stick to our abbot a few months before his repose saying, 'Take it. I will not need it any more.' He fell asleep in the Lord on the third of October, the feast of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. We have as blessings the monastic cowls of both these elders, as well as other relics.

These two elders were great exponents of the teachings of Saint Abba Isaac the Syrian. They were the embodiment of all that is written in this book, and as many as knew them can verify the truth of what we say. They were strong in interior prayer and great in divine vision. Both wept unceasingly and always had a handkerchief nearby wherewith to wipe their tears. They were unable to pronounce the blessed Name of our Saviour or say the words 'Father' or 'Mother' (referring, of course, to our Father which is in the Heavens and to the Theotokos) without tears welling up in their eyes in evident compunction. They were mournful souls, but had a joyfulness about them by which they were able to comfort those who visited them.

Both continually quoted Saint Isaac during their conversations. So much did they breathe and live the very things contained in this book, that they were unable to speak without either directly quoting or paraphrasing the teachings of the saint, even as they experienced them. From their experience and utterances, as it has been related to us by our abbot and others who knew them, and their own words from letters and conversations which have been published in Greek, we have been greatly helped in understanding certain difficult passages of Saint Isaac. We have been greatly blessed by this living tradition and bond with Saint Isaac through the two great elders Joseph and Ieronymos who had been deemed worthy of divine vision and imparted to others still with us this living tradition. They exhorted whoever visited them to read Abba Isaac the Syrian and to apply what they could to their own lives, giving personal examples from their own experience and that of those who came before them.

The elders knew each other during their lifetime. Before the Second World War, Father Ieronymos would visit the Holy Mountain almost annually and stay with the *synodia* of the Elder Joseph, exchanging notes on the spiritual life. Actually, the nun Eupraxia who looked after the Elder Ieronymos on the island of Aegina was the sister of the Elder Arsenios, who was the second after Father Joseph in their *synodia* on the Holy Mountain. Father Arsenios and his sister were from Pontus of Asia Minor, and both reposed close to the age of one hundred, Father Arsenios in the summer of 1983, and Mother Eupraxia on July 29/August 11, 1990. Being compatriots therefore, Fathers Ieronymos and Arsenios spoke Turkish, which was easier for

them than Greek which they had learned as a second language. But from the beginning of the Second World War until their blessed repose, both Father Joseph and Father Ieronymos became recluses. Father Joseph never again departed from the Holy Mountain to visit various spiritual children and the convents of the traditionalist Orthodox, and Father Ieronymos rarely left his hermitage on Aegina, except for reasons of health or for some great need. Yet both were visited by many during these years of seclusion, and especially toward the end of their lives, even individuals from abroad came to see them.

Dear reader, although there does not appear to be an order in the numbering of the homilies, outside of a few groups of homilies which are evidently related, yet if one is attentive one will come to the realization that there is a thin thread which is woven throughout, and a subtle progression which finally culminates in Homily 77, 'On how much honor humility obtains, and how very lofty is its rank.' For Saint Isaac, humility is the end and goal of Christian life. First comes faith, followed by fear which gives birth to repentance, that good change, and which in turn brings one to love (see Homily 46, p. 357):

> Repentance is the ship, and fear is the pilot; love is the divine haven. Thus fear sets us in the ship of repentance, transports us over the foul sea of this life (that is, of the world), and guides us to the divine port, which is love. [p. 359]

Love in turn deifies us and makes us like the Beloved. Only then does one attain to humility 'which is the fullness of all mysteries and the citadel of all virtues' (p. 538). 'For humility is the raiment of the Godhead' (p. 534). And he who has donned humility has put on God. 'Wherefore every man has put on Christ when he is clothed with the raiment wherein the Creator was seen through the body that He put on' (p. 535). 'Humility is a certain mysterious power which perfected saints receive when they have completed the whole course of their discipline' (p. 536). 'Blessed is he that has gained it, because at every moment he kisses and embraces the bosom of Jesus!' (p. 538).

Receive, O pious readers, this our offering of the God-inspired homilies of our Father among the Saints, Abba Isaac the Syrian, as it

were the fiery chariot of Saint Elias the Thesbite by which we are able to mount to the Heavens, for truly they are sent to us from God for this purpose. Embrace this holy book tightly in your bosom. Put it over your heart. Touch it to your forehead and eyes for a blessing. Kiss it reverently with tears, and thank our God and Benefactor that it has come down to us from antiquity throughout the ages, being preserved for our edification and instruction. Shout praises to him that labored to write it for our love. Out of Eden does it proceed like a mighty river of living water for to carry us home on its billows, beyond the great ocean 'unto the isle that lies beyond the world, where is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (p. 359).

Remember us also, beloved brethren, fellow pilgrims and sojourners in this conversation here below, and pray that we attain to the Je-
Gal. 4:26 rusalem above, which is free, and the mother of us all. Amen.

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION MONASTERY

Feast of our Holy Fathers Among the Saints
Ephraim and Isaac the Syrians, January 28, 1984,
And updated for the Second Edition in the summer of 2009

Encomium

An Offering of Praise to Saint Abba Isaac the Syrian,
Inadequate for the Sublimity of its Subject,
but Written With Much Love

PHOTIOS KONTOGLOU

> The man to whom wisdom has been given knows the inward essences of immaterial things and what is the origin and consummation of the world.
>
> – Thalassius the Lybian (Century 1:47)

He who wishes to praise the holy Isaac should hold an Archangel's trumpet, and not this sinful pen I have here in my hand.

Who will weave an unfading garland for his head? With what melodious praise could any human being laud this man who is hymned by the very angels? With the harmonious art of the tongue, come now, let us extol this humble wildflower of Syria, this gold-spangled fountain of immortality, this salt of the earth, this honeybee of virtue, this gold-stringed lute which ravishes the heart, this divinely-fashioned intellect, this glory of the Orient, this tremendous ocean, this enchanted light shining to unfathomed depths, this blessed child of God, and whatever else our tongue may call him, accustomed as it is to speak of trivialities.

But better yet by far, let us approach with reverence and ardor, and let us come together, like some spiritual troupe, around this precious gift which the Lord has sent us.

And the muse who will inspire us will be gratefulness, that we are able to take delight in that which is really true, and not in shadows and illusions, 'mockeries of magic art,' as Solomon calls them. Wisd. 17:7

Let us weep with joy, and let us call all those who would slake their thirst at this exquisite spring. Then our inner being will burst into flower, soaked with vivifying water, while before we lay all fallow, full of burrs and thorns.

Like a four-leafed clover in a pasture, that is what Saint Isaac is among men, and harder yet to find.

He is truly so hard to find because he arrayed himself in the splendor of humility, and wrote his holy words not to be glorified himself, but so that his Lord might be glorified. Some blessed men found them where they were written down, and they joyfully gathered them up like pearls from some unheard-of, unearthly sea; and God preserved them till our own evil days. Let no one, however, off-handedly approach this priceless ark, but with fear and trembling, because it would not be right for anyone who has ruined his palate with the foul and poisonous liquors of this world to refresh himself here.

Saint Isaac, you might say, had wisdom sit like a golden bee on his mouth. Not the futile and bewildered wisdom of the clever, but the unfading wisdom, the source of incorruption, which truly liberates the man who possesses it. This is the wisdom which Solomon preferred to a scepter and to royal thrones. He likens it to a priceless jewel, because all the gold on earth is like a handful of dust before it, like mire compared to silver. Solomon says that he loved it more than health and beauty, and he chose it as a lamp to light his paths, because its radiance is never quenched. Through it he was made worthy of possessing all goods at once, of receiving countless riches, and of enjoying all things, because all things come from wisdom, and she gives birth to all; she was standing next to God even when God formed the world.

Now because the Holy Spirit speaks through Isaac's mouth, the words of this thrice-blessed saint are matchless in their beauty and are fired with a divine spark. That is why, even though he writes so much, he makes a holy silence come to rest within our spirit, just as if there were no one speaking, but we only heard the distant echoing of a sea hidden from our sight.

Peace covers him like a bishop's mantle; in his hand, for a staff, he carries the wand of humility, which is a token of the great authority whereof those who love the truth are deemed worthy.

Could it be that he is the formidable Enoch – Adam's grandson, who is found with his body in eternity – and that he has appeared on the ancient soil of the East to instruct us in awesome mysteries?

His eye scans the sun and remains undazzled. He is like some incomparable eagle who rises up above the clouds and soars untroubled

over the dark mountains, viewing the great gulf from afar, while we, who are sitting inside a narrow well-shaft, cry out to him to have mercy on us.

The sun comes up from the East; from that region too this saint arose, from there this dove has flown, holding the olive branch in his beak, and bringing it to all who are shut up in the narrow ark. He dwelt like a lone tree, far away from mankind, in the desert regions of the blessed land of Mesopotamia. Eventually his holiness and his purity of life become known; and they ordained him, against his will, bishop of Nineveh. But he did not sit very long on the throne of the Christian Babylon, because the evils of the world, its impure spirits and its passions, embittered him, and he turned right around, back to the desert, to his beloved refuge.

Bewinged with love for God, he lived for many years in solitude. The Lord blessed him and held him by the hand, so that he could climb up Jacob's ladder. He made him a chalice and paten of wisdom, the mentor of ascetics, and initiator into the lofty mysteries of Christianity. This hallowed live-oak spreads out its branches and covers all who long to relax in its shade. How fortunate the man who has turned to this true seer and heard the oracles of salvation!

Most people would say that those hermits and ascetics who used to torment their bodies were just a bunch of simple, ignorant, bigoted fellows who lived in their caves out of superstitiousness, or went up on pillars out of vanity.[1] For most people the wisdom of God is foolishness, as Paul says, whose tongue was golden. Such proud persons, and the experts who have taught them, cannot even imagine what the soul of those holy men held inside, and what they were judged worthy of understanding and seeing. 'Many are the children of the desolate,' as Scripture says, 'more than of her who has the husband.' The children, then, of the desert are not only more numerous than those of the cities, but they are more marvellous too, and they are more worthy of our reverence. Isa. 54:1

The God-inspired sayings which this non-fleshly hand has chis-

1. It is as if Kontoglou had read the review of Wensinck's translation printed in the *Oxford Journal of Theological Studies:* 'I confess that I do not find Isaac of Niniveh inspiring. He represents that complete abandonment of the world, which handed over the Orient to Islam, to barbarism, and to stagnation. And when we examine the reasons for this renunciation it appears to be very little but selfishness based on superstition.' F.C. Burkitt, *JTL,* Vol. XXVI, 1924, p. 82.

elled out were written in the Syriac language. From this alone I would suppose that this language reached great perfection, because it could express such unattainable thoughts, as subtle and as hard to grasp as light.

Nevertheless, most of the educated are only going to admire from the outside the masterful way these sayings are turned, the odd glints they give off, a few of the soaring high points and paradoxes; they will not be able, however, to see the inner riches and the mother-of-pearl depths of this entrancing abyss; they will remain strangers, unable to taste that blissful delight. The key to this prolific mind and this deep soul is given to the humble man, and to the man who searches by the light of faith, but not to the expert. To all but these this spiritual paradise is locked, and all who are confident of entering by their knowledge remain sitting outside the gate, like Adam.

It is obvious that the ascetical homilies which Saint Isaac wrote must, in the Syriac language, be something out of this world. You would say that this marvellous Elder did not dip his quill in ink, but in something immortal.

I have not come across anything written about Saint Isaac in any book from Europe. We have left him to be forgotten like a light hidden under a bushel. But there was an Orthodox fellow, a Russian, Dostoyevsky, who wrote about him in one of his books; I thought of it the other day when this book was being printed. No theologians remembered him, just this sinful fellow, a no-gooder, a gambler, a soul curried like leather from agony, the prodigal son. But for him they killed the fatted calf: 'The publicans and the harlots go before you into the Kingdom of the Heavens.'

Come, then, quench your thirst at an immortal spring. All have been invited to this radiant drinking-assembly. The table is set with bread from Heaven. Let us put the light on the lampstand and scatter the darkness around us.

On the boards of this book someone should write: ἄκος ψυχῆς, the words written over the ancient library of Ozymandias, the king of Egypt, and which mean, *The Soul's Cure*. Come, then, all who are ill, and receive healing. Do not, however, come loaded down with the heavy chains of sophisticatedness and pride. Come, rather, with compunction and with a pure heart, because these will show you the path that brings a man to the mystical garden.

Just as a woman gives birth with labor pains, so every man suffers pains who wishes to strip himself of the old man. But after this his eyes will be opened to a new kind of light, and like a man who has been raised from the dead, he will rejoice and be continually astonished. He will see another world, and he will hear another harmony which heretofore his calloused heart did not even suspect.

Then the words which the golden-tongued Paul wrote to the Galatians, 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,' will not be a mere saying, like any saying, but cool, brimming fountains. Then, together with Sirach, he will say, 'There are yet hid greater things than these, for we have seen but a few of His works.' Ecclus. 43:32

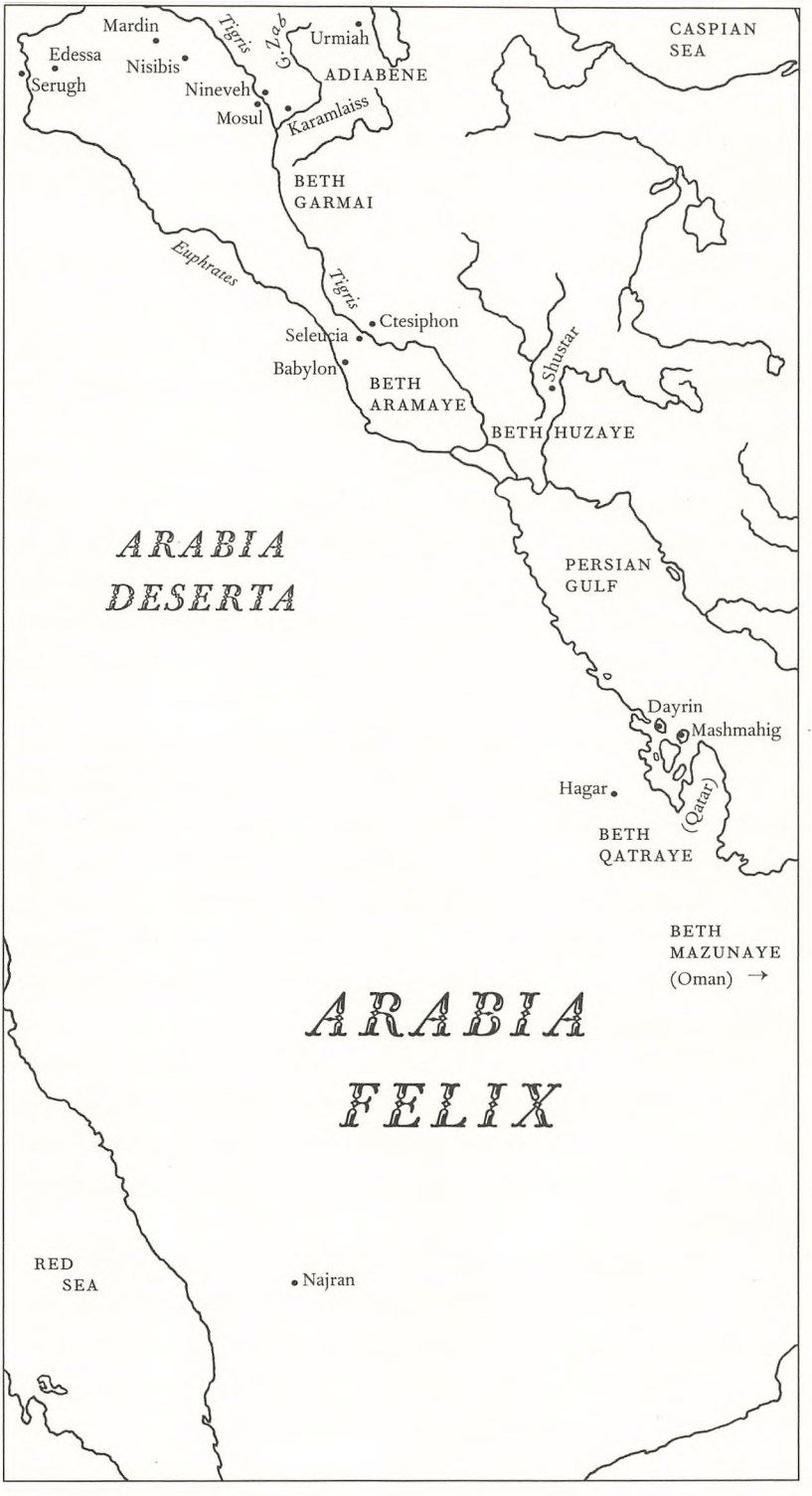
Even the earth and the creatures of this world, which all of us see, will then take on an indescribable appearance and an unfading beauty, made resplendent by a joyous ray. His tormented soul, worn out by barren systems of knowledge, will skip with delight, and will make sail like a clipper whose canvas swells with a sweet fresh breeze, who keeps her course, exulting on that sea which is beyond the oceans and beyond the isles of this earth.

O Lord, merciful Father, with these writings of mine make someone, even just one lone man, turn to Thy holy will. Grant that he may see the unwaning light, even if he is one of those souls which wallow in sin with no hope, which are voluntarily condemned by their own selves. According to Thy word, there is great joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents. Open the doors that are shut, and make us worthy to see Thy mysteries. Give our spirit wings so that we can fly up to Thy majesty.

A drop looks like more before the ocean, and a speck of sand is bigger in front of the Himalayas, than man is before Thee. But even so, Thine own love raises him up and makes him grow, so that he can become a partaker of Thy glory, and become the honored child of Thy greatness.

Blessed is he alone who has loved Thee! For Thou art
the untrackable Source of life, the great River, the unwinking Eye,
and everything else our feeble tongue can say, and everything
which cannot be uttered, either by angels or by men.
Thy Name is not a word for our mouth.

Athens, 1944


Mardin
Tigris
Urmiah
CASPIAN SEA
Edessa
Nisibis
Zab, G.
Serugh
ADIABENE
Nineveh
Mosul
Karamlaiss
BETH GARMAI
Euphrates
Tigris
Ctesiphon
Seleucia
Shustar
Babylon
BETH ARAMAYE
BETH HUZAYE
ARABIA DESERTA
PERSIAN GULF
Dayrin
Mashmahig
Hagar
(Qatar)
BETH QATRAYE
BETH MAZUNAYE (Oman) →
ARABIA FELIX
RED SEA
Najran

Translator's Introduction

A Historical Account of the Life and Writings of Saint Isaac the Syrian

SAINT ISAAC, the great exponent of withdrawal from the world, himself so eluded the world's notice that the historical facts we have about him hardly fill half a page.

He was born in the early seventh century in Beth Qatraye, a province on the northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. He received a sound education in the sacred Scriptures and patristic writings, and became a cenobitic monk and a sacred teacher. In the year 676, George, Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Persia, came to Beth Qatraye to attend the Synod of Dayrin,[1] after which he took Saint Isaac back to Persia and ordained him Bishop of Nineveh in the monastery of Beth 'Abe. After serving as bishop for five months, the saint withdrew from the episcopacy and retired to the mountain of Matout in the region of Beth Huzaye and led a life of prayer and stillness there for many years, until old age compelled him to enter the monastery of Rabban Shabur, where he ended his days and was buried.

The writings of this man who fled from human glory made him famous within a hundred years of his death: a portion of them was translated from Syriac into Greek, and from Greek into Arabic, Georgian, Latin (and thence into French, Italian, Catalan, Castilian, and Portuguese), Amharic, Slavonic (and thence into Russian) and, in the last century and a half, into German, English, Japanese, Malayalam, and Persian, in addition to revised translations and editions of the older versions.

He was read and celebrated as a saint and spiritual guide by the great hesychast Fathers of the fourteenth century; was popular enough in the West for Christopher Columbus's son to have pos-

1. Dayrin is the modern Darin on Tarut Island northwest of Qatar along the coast. In ancient times it was the destination for the trade in musk brought from India and Ceylon and conveyed across Arabia to the Mediterranean coast and Europe.

sessed a copy of the Catalan translation, and for a companion of Columbus's on his second voyage to the New World to have made the first Castilian translation; and was so beloved in Orthodox Russia that frequent mention is made of him in *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Brothers Karamazov.*

We know Saint Isaac above all from his writings. What is lacking in historical information about him is more than compensated by the striking and deeply endearing image we have of him from his heart and mind as expressed in the Homilies. Doubtless everyone who has read him over time and with attention feels that he knows the Saint far better than many writers of whom we possess endless details of historical fact. Yet precisely because he is so beloved, we will set forth as much as can be further gleaned or inferred about him from the sources available to us.

Syriac literature has retained two short accounts of the Saint. The first was written by the ninth-century East Syrian author Isho'denah, who composed a work entitled *The Book of Chastity,* comprising short histories of famous monks of the Persian Church who lived before his time.

> 124. On the holy Mar Isaac, Bishop of Nineveh, who abdicated from his episcopacy and composed books on the discipline of solitude.
>
> He was ordained bishop of Nineveh by Mar George the Catholicos[2] in the monastery of Beth 'Abe.[3] But after he had held the office of the Shepherd of Nineveh for five months (in succession to Moses, the

2. George was Catholicos from 660 to 680. He was from Kaphra in Beth Garmai, became a monk in the Monastery of Beth 'Abe (where he later ordained St. Isaac bishop), and was taken by Isho'yahb to Mosul, then to Arbeil and ordained by him Bishop of Arbeil when Isho'yahb himself was made Catholicos (as Isho'yahb III). Upon dying, Isho'yahb directed that 'his disciple George' should succeed him. *The Synodicon Orientale,* ed. and trans. J. B. Chabot (Paris, 1902), p. 480.

3. 'The exact situation of the Monastery of Beth 'Abhê is unknown, but it is quite clear that it must have stood in the mountains at a short distance from the Upper or Great Zab, on its right bank ... The monastery was built in the mountains to the south of Herpâ in Saphsâphâ under Mount Niphates, about sixty or seventy miles to the N.E. of Môsul.' *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga A.D. 840,* ed. and trans. E. A. W. Budge (London, 1893), Vol. I, p. xli. Since the Great Zab flows north to south, the right bank would be on the western side, facing Nineveh and Mosul. See map on p. 50. Pages xli–cxvi of Budge's Introduction to *The Book of Governors* deal with the Monastery of Beth 'Abe and its abbots.

bishop before him), he abdicated his episcopacy for a reason which God knows, and he departed and dwelt in the mountains. After that the throne was vacant for a time, and then the blessed Sabrisho' was ordained after him. He likewise abandoned his episcopacy and became an anchorite in the days of Henanisho' the Catholicos, and he fell asleep in the monastery of Mar Shehin in the region of Qardu. Now after Isaac abandoned the throne of Nineveh, he ascended the mountain of Matout, which is encircled by the region of Beth Huzaye, and he dwelt in stillness together with the anchorites who lived thereabouts. Afterward he went to the monastery of Rabban Shabur. He was exceedingly well versed in the divine writings, even to the point that he lost his eyesight by reason of his reading and asceticism. He entered deeply into the divine mysteries and composed books on the divine discipline of solitude. He said, however, three points that were not accepted by many. Daniel Bar Tubanitha, bishop of Beth Garmai, was scandalized at him on account of these [*three*] propositions which he expounded. When he reached deep old age, he departed from temporal life, and his body was placed in the monastery of Shabur. He was born in Beth Qatraye, and I think that envy was stirred up against him by those who dwelt in the interior,[4] even as was the case with Joseph Hazzaya, John of Apamea, and John of Dalyatha.[5]

The second document has been preserved by the West Syrians; its author and date of composition are unknown.

Further we record the history (or indeed the triumph) of the blessed Father Mar Isaac, which declares his homeland, his way of life, and how he was bishop of Nineveh, but afterward forsook this and went to a monastery and composed five volumes of instruction for monks. This Mar Isaac of Nineveh was born in the region of Beth Qatraye

4. I.e. the central region of the Persian kingdom lying around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

5. Isho'denah, *Le Livre de la Chasteté*, ed. J. B. Chabot, *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* 16 (1896), pp. 53–54 (63–64). On Joseph Hazzaya and his mention here, see A. Guillaumont, 'Sources de la doctrine de Joseph Hazzaya,' *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958), pp. 3–24. On John of Apamea, who may, or may not, be John the Solitary, see R. Lavenant, 'Le problème de Jean d'Apamée,' *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (OCP) 46 (1980), pp. 367–90. On John of Dalyatha, also known as John Saba, see B. Colless, 'Le Mystère de Jean Saba,' *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967), pp. 515–23, and 'The Biographies of John Saba,' *Parole de l'Orient* 3 (1972), pp. 45–63; also R. Beulay, 'La question de l'identité de Jean Saba,' *Parole de l'Orient* 3 (1972), pp. 88–116.

beneath India. When he had become versed in the writings of the Church and the commentaries, he became a monk[6] and a teacher in his own region. But when Mar George the Catholicos came to his[7] region, he took him to Beth Aramaye[8] because one of [*Saint Isaac's*] relatives was Mar Gabriel of Qatar, the [*scriptural*] interpreter of the Church. Mar Isaac was ordained bishop of Nineveh in the monastery of Beth 'Abe. But because of the acuteness of his understanding and his zeal, he could only endure the pastoral care of his city for five months; then he returned to his stillness. He persuaded the Papa[9] to dismiss him, and the Papa gave him the command [*to depart*]. Then he left and dwelt in stillness in the mountain of Beth Huzaye together with the monks who lived thereabouts. Finally he became blind and the brethren wrote down his teaching. They called him the second Didymus, for indeed, he was quiet, kind, and humble, and his word was gentle. He ate only three loaves a week with some vegetables, and he did not taste any food that was cooked. He composed five volumes, that are known even until this day, [*filled with*] sweet teaching....[10] Thereafter, when he had grown old and advanced in years, he departed unto our Lord, and he was placed in the monastery of Mar Shabur. May the prayer of the Theotokos Mary and his prayer and that of all the saints be with us! Amen.[11]

These accounts agree both with what little Saint Isaac tells us about himself and with what is known of the history of the time. From his Homilies it is evident that he was very well versed in Scripture, in patristic writings, and in secular literature translated from

6. Syr. *dairaya*, properly a monk who dwells in a monastery (a *daira*).

7. I.e. St. Isaac's, in the month of Iyar (May), A.D. 676, for the Synod of Dayrin. In the *Synodicon Orientale*, Chabot lists the Bishops of this Synod: 'George, Catholicos, Patriarch of the East'; 'Thomas, Metropolitan of Beth Qatraye'; 'Isho'yahb, Bishop of the Island of Dayrin'; 'Sergius, Bishop of Trihan'; 'Stephen, Bishop of Mazunaye' (Oman); 'Pousai, Bishop of Hagar' (or Hajar; the modern Oasis of al-Hasa in Saudi Arabia); 'Shahin, Bishop of Hatta,' p. 216 (482). Pages 480–90 give a French translation of the Canons of this Synod; pp. 215–26, the original Syriac. With the exception of George the Catholicos, all were bishops of dioceses in eastern Arabia. See the Map on p. 50.

8. I.e. the heartland of the Persian Church, situated around the river Tigris.

9. I.e. the Catholicos.

10. Here follows a quotation from a letter of Mar Dezadaq showing how much he held St. Isaac's writings in esteem. For the quotation, see below, p. 64.

11. *Studia Syriaca* I, ed. I. Rahmani (Beirut, 1904), p. 33 (32–33).

Greek.[12] The latter he must have studied during his early years, for from his admonitions to others we may surmise that he strictly limited his own reading when he lived as an anchorite. For example, he writes: 'The course of your reading should be parallel to the aim of your way of life. . . . The reading of many diverse books lets loose upon you distraction of mind. Know, then, that not every book that teaches about religion is useful for the purification of the conscience and the concentration of the thoughts. But do not dispute about the precise truth of these things with a man who does not know the truth' (p. 450). After gaining considerable erudition, Saint Isaac took up the monastic life, probably in some monastery rather than as a hermit in solitude, and was honored with the position of teacher in his native land of Qatar. The office of teacher was an important position in the Church of Persia, which maintained an excellent system of ecclesiastical schools with a strict, semi-monastic regime.

The province of Qatar extended along the western shore of the Persian Gulf, encompassing northeastern Saudi Arabia, the present-day Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the islands in the Gulf of Persia. It is likely that Christianity came early to the area because of an active pearl trade and the passage of much commerce between Persia and India. Bishops of Qatar appear in the ecclesiastic list of the local Council of 410, but nothing more is known of the monasteries of Qatar save that they existed.[13] If, however, one is to judge by the writings of Saint Isaac and the seventh-century writer Dadisho' of Qatar,[14] he may be certain that monasticism flourished.

In 648, or a little later, the bishops of Qatar separated themselves from the Catholicos and the bishops of the Tigris-Euphrates region and joined insurgent bishops of eastern Persia. Although the precise

12. In his *Short History of Syriac Literature* (London 1894), Wright alludes to an observation of Assemani's that St. Isaac can be placed in time by 'his citing Jacob of Serugh' (+521), p. 110. Since he gives no reference for this, we are unable to verify it.

13. For more information about Qatar in this period, see F.M. Fiey, 'Diocèses syriens orientaux du Golfe Persique,' in *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis* (Louvain, 1969), pp. 177–219.

14. His published writings are: 'On Solitude' in A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies* VII, pp. 201–47 (70–143); and 'Commentary on the Book of Abba Isaias,' ed. and trans. by R. Draguet in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (CSCO) 326, 327 (Louvain, 1972).

causes of this schism are unknown, five letters which the Catholicos Isho'yahb III wrote to the bishops, citizens, and monks of Qatar have been preserved.[15] In these letters Isho'yahb remonstrates with the bishops, accuses them of rebellion, of cutting themselves off from the Church (i.e. the Church of Persia), of divorcing themselves from the grace of the priesthood, but not of heresy as such. Finally, after the year 649, the Catholicos convened a council to depose the schismatical bishops, and then admonished the citizens and monks of Qatar to shun them. Notwithstanding, his efforts to put an end to the schism were unsuccessful. Amid the turmoil some monks of Qatar either left the region or withdrew to inaccessible places, while others were persecuted and driven out because they refused to support the bishops.[16]

Certain autobiographical remarks in the twenty-first homily indicate that Saint Isaac dwelt in a foreign region when he was a young monk. He writes, 'I had no acquaintance in that region' (p. 226), and relates how he questioned an elder about a thought arising from foolish zeal (see pp. 227–28). Because an older, more experienced monk would probably not have needed to ask about this thought, it is possible that he was still young at the time; and the elder's answer shows that Saint Isaac was a stranger: 'No one knows you in this region, nor does anyone know what your fame is' (p. 227). His 'fame' is probably the renown for learning he enjoyed in Qatar. If we hypothesize that Saint Isaac was seventy-five years old in 688 (which could be the approximate date of the composition of the Homilies),[17] he was thirty-five in 648. About this time, because of the ecclesiastical disorders in Qatar, Saint Isaac quit his native land and dwelt among the monks of another region of Persia. The Homilies do not afford any clues to determine how long he stayed in this foreign region, or even where it was. One might surmise, however, that during this period he either

15. *Isho'yahb Patriarchae III, Liber Epistularum*, ed. and trans. R. Duval, CSCO 11 (12), (Louvain, 1904), pp. 260–83 (188–204), Letters 17–21.

16. In Letter 19, to the citizens of Qatar, Isho'yahb writes, 'With boundless impudence he (i.e. Abraham, Bishop of Mashmahig) has dared to drive out of your land the small remnant of the saints of God who were found there' (p. 271 [196]). The words 'the remnant of the saints of God' refer to the monks who had not already withdrawn from the region.

17. For reasons given below one can surmise that St. Isaac wrote the Homilies toward the end of his life.

dwelt in, or passed through, the mountainous parts of Beth Huzaye (now the province of Khuzistan in southwestern Iran). Beth Huzaye is sufficiently close to Qatar to have enabled him to keep informed about the ecclesiastical affairs that may have compelled him to leave his homeland, and it was to Beth Huzaye that he went directly after his flight from Nineveh. One may suppose that he would not have gone to Beth Huzaye straightway if he had had no previous knowledge of the monasticism practised there.

It was not until the year 676, in the reign of George the Catholicos, that the Church of Qatar was reunited with the mother Church of Persia. In that year the Catholicos himself went to Qatar to heal the schism.[18] Perhaps as an additional sign of union of the two Churches, he brought back Saint Isaac, an illustrious native son of Qatar, to make him bishop of the respected see of Nineveh. It is evident that by this time Saint Isaac had already returned to Qatar. The second Life intimates that he was living there as a solitary, or as a recluse in some monastery, for it says that after he left Nineveh, 'he returned to his stillness.' It is possible that the Catholicos had heard of Saint Isaac from the saint's relative Gabriel; and perhaps because of the latter's fame, he thought Saint Isaac would be accepted in Nineveh.

Considering the saint's views on strict asceticism, it is astonishing that he accepted ordination at all. Only severe constraint and some ulterior good, such as to help reunite the Church of Qatar with her mother Church, could have induced him to accept. In Saint Isaac's own words, 'The saints seek for themselves this sign of complete likeness to God: to be perfect in the love of their neighbor' (p. 493).

Although it is well known that Saint Isaac speedily abandoned the see of Nineveh, the precise reason why remains a subject of speculation. Isho'denah cautiously says, 'for a reason which God knows.' The second account of the saint's life attributes his flight to 'the acuteness of his understanding and his zeal.'[19]

18. See Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors,* p. 86, Vol. I, for the Syriac, and p. 188, Vol. II, for the English; and the *Synodicon Orientale,* Chabot, pp. 215–26 (480–90).

19. An Arabic manuscript (Vatican 198) has preserved the following story, derived from a West Syrian source: 'As he was sitting in the episcopal residence on the first day after his ordination, lo, two men disputing with one another entered the bishop's chamber. One of these men demanded the return of a loan, and the other admitted to be the debtor; while the latter loudly begged for the payment to be put off, the former required

It could very well be that the citizens of Nineveh were displeased to have a foreigner as their bishop. When, in his early years, the illustrious Catholicos Isho'yahb III was appointed bishop of Nineveh (about 630), 'a whole campaign was raised up against the new bishop, accusing him of being the cause of all the evils of the time.'[20] Although Isho'yahb was a renowned personage and came from the neighboring district of Adiabene, the citizens of Nineveh repulsed him, and only with difficulty were they finally reconciled to him. The

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it to be returned. Then the wretched rich man said, "If this man refuses to give back what is mine, I shall be forced to summon him to court." Saint Mar Isaac answered him, "Since the sacred Gospel teaches not to take back what has been given away, you should at least grant this man a day to make his payment." To this the impious man replied, "Put aside for now the teachings of the Gospel!" Then Saint Isaac said, "If the Gospel is not present, what have I come here to do?" Seeing therefore that the office of Bishop was disturbing his solitary life, the holy man abdicated from his episcopacy and fled to the holy desert of Scete (in Egypt).' This story was translated into Latin by Assemani (J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* [BO] I [Rome, 1719], p. 445); thereafter it was placed in the introduction to the Greek Edition of 1770 by Nikephoros Theotokis. The two Syriac accounts cited earlier agree that he endured the episcopacy for five months, not only one day; and the flight to the desert of Scete impairs the credibility of the whole account. That the cares of his bishopric were disturbing his solitary life, however, rings true, and it may be that, besides whatever other reasons he had, after five months he had had time to see his full loss in giving up his former stillness, and sought the divine will on returning thereto. Compare the life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, who after eleven years of his episcopacy 'laid the matter of his resignation before St. George in prayer and besought God that he might without condemnation deliver up his bishopric. He received assurance that his request was granted.' Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints,* 1948, p. 141; and the life of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, who after two years as bishop returned to his stillness. J. F. Webb, *Lives of the Saints,* Penguin Books, 1965, p. 114. It may be that the disturbances of his five months' episcopacy brought the Saint to such a deep experience of his own need for communing with God through prayer in solitude, and of the weakness of human nature to remedy the ills and contentions of the fallen world, that this at least in part was what later led him to write, 'Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world's starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. It is better for you to free yourself from the shackle of sin than to free slaves from their slavery. It is better for you to make peace with your soul, causing concord to reign over the trinity within you (I mean, the body, the soul, and the spirit), than by your teaching to bring peace among men at variance. For, as Gregory the Theologian says, "It is a good thing to speak concerning the things of God for God's sake, but it is better for a man to make himself pure for God."' Homily 4, p. 144.

20. J. M. Fiey, 'Isho'yaw le Grand,' OCP 35 (1969), p. 325. It was Isho'yahb III who ordained as bishop that George who, succeeding him as Catholicos, ordained St. Isaac bishop. See note 2 above.

appointment of Saint Isaac, who came from the distant, uncivilized region of Qatar, which had been in schism for the past twenty-five years, must have been regarded by the Ninevites with the utmost displeasure. At that time Nineveh and its environs, being near the Jacobite stronghold, the monastery of Mar Matta, was a center of Monophysite activity.[21] Continuous and vehement doctrinal dispute plagued the city, and the loyal sons of the Persian Church must have expected Saint Isaac to champion their cause against the Monophysites. We know, however, from the saint's writings the dislike he had for disputation: 'Confute those who would strive to dispute with you by the strength of your virtues, and not by the persuasiveness of your words. By the meekness and quietness of your lips, put the impudence of the obstinate to silence, and not by speaking' (p. 145). 'Do not provoke any man or vie zealously with him, either for the sake of the Faith, or on account of his evil deeds' (p. 168). Such a sermon, such actions, could have been misinterpreted, especially by narrow-minded persons. If, as bishop, Saint Isaac remained as silent on Christological subjects as he does in his Homilies, many suspicions would have arisen.

Furthermore, the Diptychs of Karamlaiss[22] omit Saint Isaac's name in the list of the bishops of Nineveh. The list in the diptychs is not complete: the names of Saint Isaac's predecessor and successor, according to Isho'denah's report, are also absent. Nevertheless, by the time the diptychs were composed, Saint Isaac was a personage of considerable reputation. Since he was generally referred to as 'of Nineveh,' and it was commonly known that he had quit that see, one might conclude that his name was omitted not by oversight or from ignorance, but intentionally. It may be that Saint Isaac's powerful rebuke of misguided zeal ('Zeal is not reckoned among men to be a form of wisdom, but as one of the maladies of the soul, namely nar-

21. E.g. in the Life of Rabban Bar 'Edta (early 7th cent.) we read: 'Two months afterward, the Severian [*Monophysite*] Zakkai took control over the two monasteries through the influence of Gabriel, the physician of the king. This wicked Zakkai did much evil to our Church; he drew to himself many of the villages of the region of Nineveh and corrupted them' (A. Scher, 'Analyse de l'Histoire de Rabban Bar 'Edta,' *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* [ROC] 11 [1906], p. 419).

22. J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne* II (Beirut, 1968), p. 346. For Karamlaiss, see Map, p. 50.

row-mindedness and deep ignorance.' [p. 378]) reflects animosity he encountered in Nineveh. One possible explanation, then, is that confronted by much hostility, he 'gave place unto wrath,' as the Apostle Paul says, and withdrew to the wilderness.

He chose the mountainous region of Beth Huzaye, far to the south of Nineveh and also sufficiently distant from his homeland. Thus, freed from both the controversies in the heartland of the Persian Church and the renown he enjoyed in Qatar, he dwelt for many years as a solitary on Mount Matout. Finally, forced by old age and loss of sight, he retired to the nearest monastery, that of Rabban Shabur,[23] where he passed the last years of his life. The second Life states that 'he became blind and the brethren wrote down his teaching.' Here it is implied that Saint Isaac composed the Homilies only after he retired to the monastery because of blindness; however, we know that this cannot be true, for he writes, 'Often when I was writing these things my fingers failed me in setting down everything on paper, and they were unable to endure the sweetness that descended into my heart and silenced my senses' (p. 438). Therefore, we can say with certainty that he wrote the Ascetical Homilies while he was dwelling in solitude and still endowed with sight. To this period also we should assign the three epistles, included here as Homilies 44, 45, and 65.

From the saint's writings themselves we learn that only toward the end of his life, after many years of experience in the monastic discipline, did he begin to write down his teaching. He says, 'From a man who has not gained experience of prolonged stillness do not expect to learn anything further about the good things of asceticism, even if he is a great sage and a teacher, having many achievements behind him' (p. 451). In many places he writes of the value of words spoken, or written, from experience, as, for example, 'Love uncouthness of speech joined with knowledge from inner experience more than to gush forth rivers of instruction from the keenness of your intellect

23. *Rabban* is a title (lit. 'our master' – cf. *Rabbi* 'my master'); *Shabur* is the same as the name of the Persian Kings, *Sapor* or *Shapur*. Rabban Shabur died in the middle of the seventh century; the monastery he founded was not an old institution when St. Isaac entered it. According to Dr. Sebastian Brock, his monastery was 'somewhere near Shustar/Tustar,' *From Qatar to Tokyo, by way of Mar Saba: the Translations of Isaac of Beth Qatraye* (*Isaac the Syrian*), Aram Periodical, Vol. 11–12 (1999–2000), p. 476. For Shushtar, see the map on p. 50.

and from a deposit of hearsay and writings of ink' (p. 144), and 'A man who talks of virtue from the experience of his own labor transmits virtue to his hearer' (pp. 118–9). For such reasons one may surmise that he waited until old age to write, and consequently, his writings are filled with spiritual power and authority. The following passage will illustrate this:

> Having been tempted over a great length of time in things from the right hand and from the left, and testing myself often in both, and having received countless blows from the adversary, and been deemed worthy of great and secret aid, I have carried on an examination of myself for many long years; and through experience and God's grace I have learned that the foundation of all good things, the return of the soul from the enemy's captivity, and the path which leads to the light, and itself brings life, are these two virtuous activities: to remain collected in one place, and to fast perpetually. [p. 329]

If we can thus be certain that Saint Isaac wrote toward the end of his life, and that this was at the end of the seventh century, we may conclude that he fell asleep in our Lord at the beginning of the eighth century.

Since Saint Isaac valued absolute stillness so highly one might wonder why he wrote at all. The answer can be found in the saint's own words. First of all, it was because of his ardent love for his fellow man: 'My beloved, I have become foolish, and I cannot bear to guard the mystery in silence, but I am become a fool for the sake of the profit of my brethren. For true love is not able to tarry in any mystery without her beloved' (p. 438). Secondly it was for his own spiritual profit, as well as that of his brethren:

> These things I have written down as a reminder and source of profit for myself, and for every man who comes upon this book, according to what I have understood from both the divine vision of the Scriptures and from true mouths, and a little from experience itself, in order that they might be a help to me through the prayers of those who are profited by them. For I have taken no little trouble to set these things down. [p. 202]

Saint Isaac's wish was that men would not merely read his book in an idle way, occupying their minds for a time, but that they would put his teachings into practice, live them, and thus learn through their

own experience those things about which he wrote. Only in such a way will they derive profit. He writes:

> I now compose this homily for the kindling and enlightenment of our souls, and of those who come across it, with the hope that, perchance, some might rouse themselves by reason of their desire for what I speak of, and endeavor to practise it. [p. 238]

And further:

> I beseech your love, that when you light upon these mysteries, do not leave them without gaining profit, lest they be found to be mere dead words to you, and it should befall you what befell those who were invited to that spiritual banquet but excused themselves from entering in. [p. 498]

Saint Isaac was not disappointed in his hope that men would profit; and his foreboding that some would be scandalized did not prove false. We shall treat these matters in reverse order. We recall that Isho'denah writes: 'He said, however, three points that were not accepted by many. Daniel Bar Tubanitha, the Bishop of Beth Garmai, was scandalized at him on account of these [*three*] propositions which he expounded.' In like manner 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, the thirteenth-century composer of a versified catalogue of East Syrian authors, writes of Daniel Bar Tubanitha, Bishop of Tahal in Beth Garmai, that 'He composed a solution to the questions raised by [*lit.* of] the fifth volume of Mar Isaac of Nineveh.'[24] 'Abdisho' also writes that 'Isaac of Nineveh composed seven volumes on the spiritual discipline, on divine mysteries, on judgments, and on providence.'[25] Thus we know that at one time the works of the saint were divided into seven volumes (*penqyatha*) and that Daniel Bar Tubanitha, along with others, found fault with certain propositions contained in the fifth of these. It is, however, now impossible to reconstruct with any degree of certitude this ancient division of Saint Isaac's works.

A single testimony concerning Daniel Bar Tubanitha's book has come down to us. This was recorded by the late ninth-century East Syrian writer Hanoun Ibn Yohanna Ibn as-Salt, who writes:

> Abu al-'Abbaas 'Issi Ibn Zayid Abi Malik (may God be pleased in him!), a man foremost in religion, understanding, goodness, and re-

24. BO III, 1, p. 174.

25. Ibid. p. 104.

finement, spoke to me, saying: 'Our father the Catholicos Yuhanna Ibn Barsi (may his prayers preserve us!) visited me. He took some of the writings of Mar Isaac and started reading through them without lifting up his head until the sun shone on him. Then we rose from the spot and I said to him, "You have read, my father, the writings of Mar Isaac and also what Daniel wrote as a refutation of them: which of the two, in its essence, is more trustworthy?" He replied to me: "Is it possible for a man like you to ask such a question? Mar Isaac speaks the language of the beings in Heaven, but Daniel speaks the language of the beings of earth."'[26]

It is evident that Bishop Daniel Bar Tubanitha was scandalized either because his own conceptions were shaken by some of Saint Isaac's lofty teachings (which they were we cannot know), or because he envied the saint and sought opportunity to accuse him; the latter reason is suggested by Isho'denah at the end of his Life of the saint. The intelligent reader, however, was not persuaded by Daniel's refutation.

Ibn as-Salt also gives us an interesting picture of how the writings of Saint Isaac were received and read in certain monastic circles in the ninth century in Persia. He writes:

This holy man [*Mar Isaac*] wrote his epistles and his works for perfect monks in whom he perceived a pure mind, abundant understanding, indeficient knowledge, and perfect worship of God. And they, in turn, honored his writings, acknowledged their truth, adhered to his path, and were aided by the excellence of his guidance. Then these monks unanimously agreed to withhold his writings from all who were unable [*or* unsuited] to comprehend them.[27]

And again:

Upon my life, the reading of [*Mar Isaac's*] writings is only suitable for a man who has plunged into the divine Scriptures, whose soul is apt for the inquiries of the understanding, and who has avoided the lusts of the world in his thoughts and his mind.... Youths have been rightly forbidden to delve into the secrets of the writings of this virtuous man, because wisdom is only known by her adherents.[28]

26. P. Sbath, *Traités religieux, philosophiques, et moraux, extraits des oeuvres d'Isaac de Ninive par Ibn as-Salt* (Cairo, 1934), pp. 54–55 (109).

27. Ibid. p. 54 (108–9).

28. Ibid. p. 15 (75–76).

The famous eighth-century writer Joseph Hazzaya refers to Saint Isaac as 'the illustrious among the saints, Mar Isaac.'[29] In the second Life quoted above, a passage is given from a letter written by a certain Mar Dezadaq[30] to his disciple Bushir who dwelt in the monastery of Rabban Shabur. It says: 'I thank the Lord for your solicitude which has sent to me the teaching of Mar Isaac of Nineveh. I know that you have acquired for yourself the keys of the Kingdom in [*this*] life, because you have filled our monastery with the doctrine of life. For we confess ourselves to be disciples of Mar Isaac, the bishop of Nineveh.' In another Syriac writing he is called 'the master and teacher of all monks and the haven of salvation for the whole world.'[31] And in later Syriac literature we find that the saint's writings are frequently referred to or quoted directly.[32] Thus, among the monks of Persia, Saint Isaac's works were held in the highest esteem, but at the same time some considered them dangerous for the rash and inexperienced.

As the renown of Saint Isaac's writings spread rapidly, West Syrian scribes obtained the Ascetical Homilies and, within about one hundred years after their composition, these were translated into Greek from a West Syrian manuscript. Saint Isaac's Homilies were quickly diffused throughout the monastic centers of the Byzantine Empire from the monastery of Mar Sabbas, where they were translated by two monks, fluent in Syriac and Greek, named Patrick and Abramius. The Homilies are quoted by Paul Evergetinos in his famous collection of apophthegmata and by the writer of the Life of Saint Cyril of Philea (both 11th cent.), by Saint Peter of Damascus (12th cent.), and by nearly all the writers of the hesychastic movement of the fourteenth century.[33] The great number of fourteenth-

29. A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies* VII, p. 268, col. b, l. 13 (p. 157).

30. Rahmani wishes to correct this to Jozadaq (op. cit. p. 33 [32]), a known monastic figure of the 7th cent., but this seems hardly likely.

31. J. B. Chabot, *De S. Isaaci Ninivitae,* p. vii.

32. See, e.g. the numerous direct quotations in the 11th-cent. Life of Rabban Youssef Busnaya, trans. by Chabot in ROC 4 (1899) pp. 384–415, 5 (1900) pp. 118–33.

33. E.g. St. Gregory of Sinai, St. Gregory Palamas, SS. Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, St. Nicephorus of Athos, etc. See the *Philokalia,* vols. 3–5. Irénée Hausherr suggested that St. Symeon the New Theologian (+1022) and his disciple Nicetas Stethatos were also familiar with St. Isaac's writings, but he gives no specific references. *Penthos, the Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East,* Cistercian Studies Series 53, 1982, pp. 133, 145–49.

century Greek manuscripts containing the Homilies testifies to the book's popularity. In the thirteenth or fourteenth century (as one can judge from the baroque style) someone wrote a foreword to the Homilies, extolling in florid terms the virtues of stillness (hesychasm) and Saint Isaac as well. Among other things this author writes:

> Now the blessed man Isaac also proved to be such a one [*as described in the foregoing passage*]; with great toil and hardship he composed, for the salvation of others, this sacred and most holy book, being moved by God to point out in a fitting way the path of stillness to those who ardently desire it. I beseech you, let none of you carelessly peer into the sublimely wise writings of this sage, or read them casually, for all the mellifluous teachings of this saint lead to salvation and they are filled with divine wisdom and grace. Verily, this awesome and divine man was great in his insight and holiness.... He did not give instructions in some unsuitable manner. Rather, through practical experience, with true words and unerring deeds, with great perspicacity, he gathered together man's hidden thoughts and brought them to light, revealing their black and scarlet hues, that is, the murky darkness of error and the sunlike brilliance of truth. This he did in order that those who have embraced the saving labor of stillness might make their way in pure and transparent light.[34]

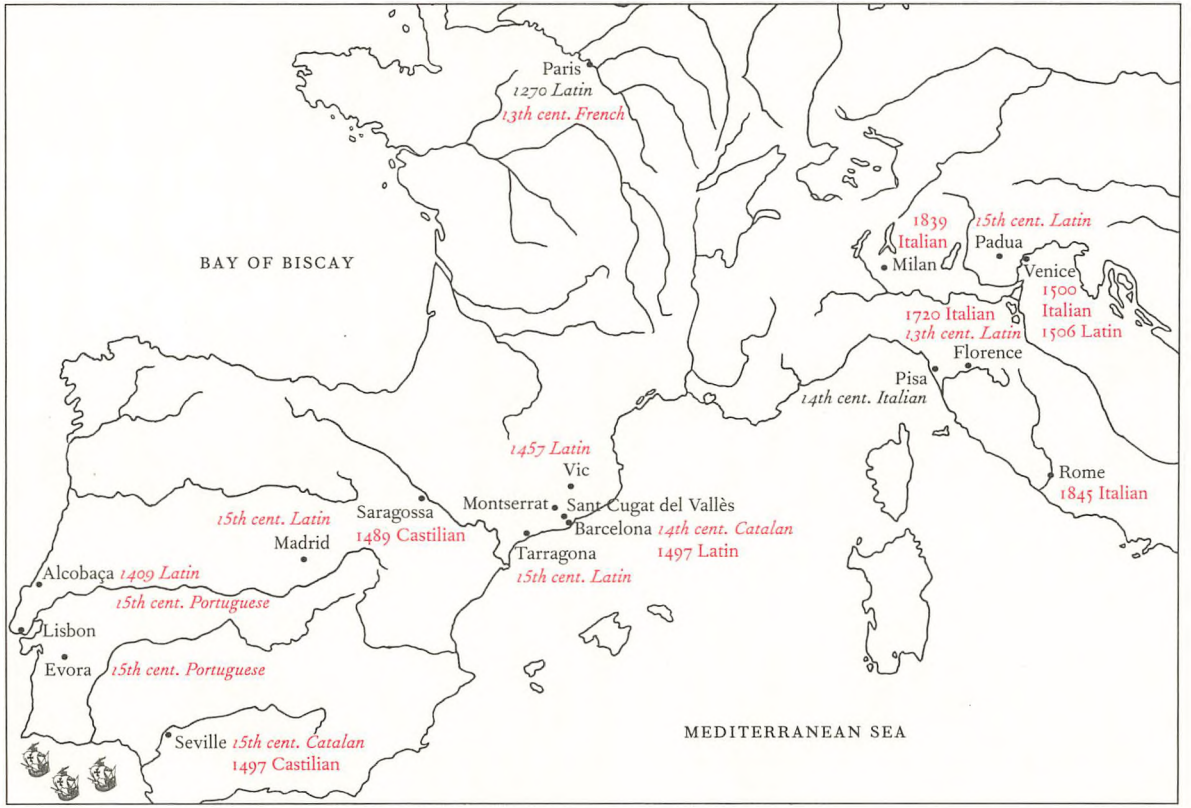
Down to our own times Saint Isaac's writings have remained one of the central texts for Greek Orthodox monks and laymen. To give one example from many, the famous Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (+1966) continually admonished his many visitors to read at least one page of Saint Isaac each day. While speaking to one person he said:

> When you read this book you both rejoice and are censured. Sometimes you do not feel up to reading it and would rather not read it at all, or you read it and do not understand anything. And sometimes you read and you cannot put it down. Yes, read it even when you do not wish to; force yourself to read at least a page each day. One page a day without fail![35]

In the tenth century Saint Isaac's Ascetical Homilies were translat-

34. The text was printed by Nikephoros Theotokis at the beginning of his edition of St. Isaac's Homilies (Leipzig, 1770), pp. *ιε*, *ιη*.

35. S. Nousi, Ὁ Γέρων Ἱερώνυμος τῆς Αἰγίνης (Athens, 1978), p. 146.



MAP OF CITIES ASSOCIATED WITH ST. ISAAC'S HOMILIES FROM THE 13TH CENTURY ON

Legend

1497 Latin
signifies a printed edition

13th cent. Latin
signifies a manuscript

1270 Latin
signifies a work with quotations from St. Isaac's homilies

ed from Greek into *Arabic* by the author 'Abdallah ben Fadhl ben 'Abdallah. The contents of the Vatican Library's Arabic codex 198[36] show that other works attributed to Saint Isaac were translated at a later date into Arabic directly from Syriac.[37]

Also, in the tenth century, the Homilies were translated from Greek into *Georgian* by Saint Euthymius of Mount Athos, founder of the Monastery of Iveron.[38]

No later than the thirteenth century, the first *Latin* translation was made from a selection of the Greek homilies. Since the Latin collections begin with what is Homily Four in this edition, 'The soul that loves God finds rest only in God ...,' and variously contain some 25 to 30 homilies, they could have been made from one of the collections now represented by Paris 370, Mar Sabbas 157, Lavra 335, or Koutloumousiou 12 (see page 107 below), which begin with Homily 4 (with the exception of Paris 370), contain enough to account for the number of Latin homilies, and date to before the twelfth century.

The oldest known manuscript of the Latin translation is that in the Laurentian Library in Florence, *Plut. LXXXIX 96,* and dates to the thirteenth century.[39] The earliest quotation of Saint Isaac's writings in the West appears in the *Tractatus Pauperis* by John Peckham, which was completed in 1270.[40]

36. J. S. and S. E. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codicum Manuscriptorum Catalogus* 1:3 (Rome, 1759), pp. 427–42.

37. See the discussion on the Arabic translation in Chabot, op. cit. pp. 54–60, and G. Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur* I, Studi e Testi 118 (Rome, 1944), pp. 436–42.

38. See M. Sabinin, *Polnoye Zhiznеopisaniye Svyatykh Gruzinskoi Tserkvi* II (St. Petersburg, 1872), p. 143. An 11th-cent. Georgian MS, Georgian 80, is found in the library of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai. Brock observes that the earliest known translations from the Greek were extracts translated into Arabic in 885/6 and into Georgian in 906, *Syriac into Greek at Mar Saba: The Translation of St. Isaac the Syrian,* in *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present,* ed. Joseph Patrich (Leuven, 2001), p. 207.

39. Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita, Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna,* L.S. Olschki (Florence, 2002), p. 356. This is by far the most complete study of St. Isaac done in recent years.

40. Ibid., pp. 295–97, 356; Sebastià Janeras, *La diffusion d'Isaac de Ninive dans la Péninsule Ibérique,* in *Eastern Crossroads,* ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, Gorgias Press, 2007, p. 250. The *Tractatus* was also called *De perfectione religiosa.* John Peckham (1225–92) joined the Franciscan order about 1250 at Oxford; later entered the University of Paris where he received his degree under Bonaventure; taught at Paris where he

¶ Liber abbatis ysach de ordinacione aie valde vtilis proviris spualib⁹ ad stirpanda vicia et adquirēdas vtutes incipit.

Anima q̄ deum diligit in deo solo quietem habet. Anticipa soluere ominez obligacionez extrisecā ate ipso et tūc deo corde poteris colligari precedit eum colligari do solucio a mūdāis Esus panis post ablactatiōnem datur infanti: et homo qui delectari vult in diuinis: prius se debet a seculo velud infans ab vberibus alienare. Operacio corporalis operacionē anime sicut in adā limus inspiracioni animam añcedit Qui corporalē acionem nō ad

Qd corporalis opatō sit fundamētum.

Incunable 592, © Biblioteca de Reserva (Universitat de Barcelona)

First printed edition of the Latin translation of Saint Isaac's Homilies, made from the Greek and printed in Barcelona in 1497. The first page of the first homily is shown above, beginning with the words, 'The soul that loves God finds rest only in God' (Homily 4 of this edition). The title reads, 'The Book of Abba Isaac, On the Orderly Governing of the Soul, exceedingly profitable for spiritual men for uprooting the vices and acquiring the virtues.' Another common title for the Latin collection is 'De contemptu mundi' – 'On Contempt for the World.'

As it is not known how the Syriac text reached the Monastery of Mar Sabbas,[41] neither is it known how the Greek text reached the West.[42] Chialà mentions three possibilities, none of which seems implausible. First, the Latin occupation of Constantinople following the infamous Fourth Crusade took place between 1204–61, at which time the Greek manuscript of Saint Isaac's Homilies might have been brought back.[43] Second, he lists a number of western scholars and monks known to have sojourned in Constantinople and Mount Athos in the twelfth century, who made Latin translations of patristic and ascetical works in Greek, such as *The Ladder of Divine Ascent,* who easily could have come across the Greek version of the Homilies. Third, he hypothesizes that the Latin translation might have been made 'within the confines of some italo-greek monastic community in southern Italy, where there were known to be centers of calligraphy, where travelling copyists and monks from the East brought various manuscripts of patristic texts.'[44]

The first printed edition of the Latin Homilies was made at Barcelona in 1497 by the printer Diego Gumiel, for García Ximenes de Cisneros, Prior of the Benedictine Monastery of Montserrat near

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knew (and disagreed with) Thomas Aquinas; was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1279 till his death in 1292. Chialà observes that the *Tractatus* has 13 direct quotations from St. Isaac (p. 296), and that one of them, which roughly corresponds to the passage 'to those who have flaming zeal for God . . . the consolation of visions and revelations is not granted to him' (see p. 304 of Homily 37), was also quoted in abbreviated form by two other Franciscans, Peter John Olivi (1248–98) and Peter of Fossombrone, better known as Angelo Clareno (1247–1337) (*Dall'ascesi eremitica,* pp. 296–97). Since Peckham taught in Paris till about 1270, the year he finished his *Tractatus,* it seems reasonable to assume that he finished it before returning to England; thus the map on p. 66 identifies Paris as the place for the '1270 Latin' quotations from St. Isaac.

41. Brock, *From Qatar to Tokyo,* p. 477.

42. Chialà, p. 355.

43. For this idea Chialà (p. 355) credits J. Munitiz, 'A Greek "Anima Christi" Prayer,' *Eastern Churches Review,* VI, 1974, pp. 170–80.

44. Chialà, pp. 355–57. This researcher's singular diligence is worthy of praise. A few of the other references to St. Isaac he has found include: the Dominican preacher Domenico Cavalca of Pisa (1270 – c.1342) quotes him in his best-known work *Specchio della Croce;* an inventory made in the fifteenth century indicates that the Monastery of St. Justina of Padua possessed three copies of the Latin version; and the works of St. Isaac were also found in the library of Philip Neri (1515–95). See *Dall'ascesi eremitica,* pp. 299–304.

Barcelona.[45] It is proposed that Cisneros, though not explicitly citing Saint Isaac, was inspired by him in his *Exercitatorio de la vida spiritual,* and that through him and the Monastery of Montserrat, Ignatius Loyola was also influenced.[46]

The first translation from the Latin of which mention is known is a *French* version made in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, that is, not long after the first Latin translation would have been completed. It is attested to by a manuscript in the National Library in Paris, originating from the Monastery of Saint Victor in Paris, and dated to the fourteenth century.[47]

After that, translations from the Latin began appearing in abundance throughout the Iberian peninsula. Of three extant manuscripts of the *Portuguese* translation, that preserved in the national library in Lisbon originates from the Cistercian monastery of Alcobaça and dates to the second half of the fifteenth century; one, now in the national library in Rio de Janeiro, is dated to about 1435; the third manuscript, dating to the second half of the fifteenth century, is preserved in the public library of Evora, and contains 37 extracts from various chapters.[48]

Three manuscripts of the *Catalan* translation also survive, the earliest of which is dated to the first half of the fifteenth century. Another of them, also from the fifteenth century, was among the goods bequeathed to the Cathedral of Seville by Hernando Columbus, Christopher's son. But a document preserved in the Archives of the Cathedral of Barcelona testifies to the existence of an earlier Catalan

45. The University of Barcelona owns two copies of this printing, the only two known presently to exist (Janeras, *La Diffusion,* pp. 253–54). One copy has been scanned and posted for viewing online by the National Library of Catalonia. At mdc.cbuc.cat enter 'Ordinatione animae' in the Search field ('Cercar').

46. Chialà, p. 305; Janeras, pp. 265–66. Pending further research, Janeras provisionally counts a total of 42 extant Latin MSS of St. Isaac's writings, of which four are found in the Iberian Peninsula: see Madrid, Vic, Tarragona, and Alcobaça 1409 on the map on p. 66. A second edition of the Latin was printed in Venice in 1506 (Janeras, p. 251).

47. Chialà, p. 358.This manuscript was composed of 43 chapters, and began with the words 'Cy commence le livre de Ysaac abbé de Syrie de l'ame amant Dieu': 'Here begins the book of Isaac, Abbot of Syria, on the soul that loves God.' Apparently this collection, like the Latin versions of which we possess the incipit as mentioned above, also begins with what is Homily Four in this collection, 'The soul that loves God finds rest only in God.'

48. Janeras, pp. 255–57.

version; it is dated June, 1373, and in it the notary Father Borrell lists the books belonging to Guillem de Vall, priest of the Cathedral of Barcelona, among which was the book of Saint Isaac's homilies, beginning, like the others we have mentioned, with the words *Anima que Déu ama – The soul that loves God.* Queen Mary (1401–58), wife of Alphonse the Magnanimous, King of Aragon, possessed two copies of the Catalan, both which also begin with *The soul that loves God . . .*[49]

The first *Castilian* translation was made at the end of the fifteenth century at the Monastery of Montserrat already mentioned, by Bernardo Buil (1445–1507). Buil (or Boil) had been the secretary of Ferdinand II of Aragon (the future 'Catholic Monarch,' better known in conjunction with his wife Isabel); in 1480 Buil embraced the eremitic life and, as superior of the hermits who dwelt on the mountain of Montserrat, translated Saint Isaac's works from Latin into Castilian on their behalf. He finished it at the Monastery of Sant Cugat[50] del Vallès in 1484, and it was printed in 1489 by Juan Hurus in Saragossa. In his introduction Buil notes that he is aware of no Castilian translation before his own. Buil afterwards accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World in 1493. An anonymous translation into Castilian, different from Buil's, was printed in Seville in 1497.[51]

Some twenty manuscripts of the *Italian* translation are dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, indicating that the translation itself might have been made as early as the thirteenth, not long after the Latin. The first printed version of the Italian was made in Venice in 1500 by the printer Boneto Locatello. A second edition was printed in Florence in 1720, a third in Milan in 1839, and a fourth in Rome in 1845.[52]

In the early fourteenth century the Homilies were translated from

49. Ibid., pp. 257–59. It is impossible in this brief survey to do justice to all the findings Dr. Janeras has presented in his paper.

50. That is, St. Cucufas, whose feast-day is July 25.

51. Janeras, pp. 261–63. Idle though it might be to speculate whether Buil took a copy of his translation with him, if he did, the Ascetical Homilies would then have been one of the first books taken to the New World, as *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus was the first book printed in the New World (in Mexico in 1537).

52. Chialà, pp. 360–62.

Greek into *Slavonic*. This translation quickly spread throughout the Slavic world, as we can see from the many late-fourteenth-century manuscripts still found in the libraries of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Russia. By reading the instructions of Saint Nilus of Sora (+1508) or Saint Seraphim of Sarov (+1833) one can readily comprehend how important the Ascetical Homilies were for Russia's long and illustrious tradition of hesychasts (*bezmolvniki*).[53]

In the sixteenth century the Ascetical Homilies were translated from Greek into *Amharic* under Lebna Dengel, sovereign ruler of Ethiopia from 1508 to 1540.[54]

In 1781 the Greek printed text was translated into *Moldavian* (Romanian) by Hieromonk Macarius and the sacred teacher Hilarion.[55]

In 1854 the Moscow Theological Academy published a complete *Russian* translation of the Homilies, employing both the existent Slavonic translation and the Greek printed text.

In 1876, in the series *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter* (fasc. 204, 205 [Kempten]), Homilies 1–6, 36, and 47 were translated from Syriac manuscripts of the British Museum into *German* by G. Bickell.

In 1910 the Russian text of the Homilies was translated into *Japanese* by Savva Horie of the Japanese Orthodox Mission.[56]

In 1923 A. J. Wensinck published an *English* translation of the Homilies, employing the Syriac text printed under Bedjan's supervision in 1909.[57] Also, in 1954 the selection of passages from the Homilies found in the Russian *Philokalia* was translated into English by Kadloubovsky and Palmer in *Early Fathers From the Philokalia*.

53. See below, pp. 92–100, for a more complete discussion of the Slavonic and Russian translations.

54. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Paris, 4, col. 1471. Chialà's research indicates that the Amharic translation was made from an Arabic version (Chialà, p. 351). In 1997 a critical edition of the Ethiopian texts was published in Hamburg with a German translation (ibid., p. 353).

55. See Starets Paisius Velichkovsky's letter to Starets Theodosius in *Zhitiye i Pisaniya Moldavskago Startsa Paisiya Velichkovskago* (Moscow, 1892), pp. 204–5. In 1981 the Romanian translation was reprinted by Fr. Dumitru Staniloae in the tenth volume of his *Philokalia*. Brock, *From Qatar to Tokyo*, p. 480; Chialà, pp. 347–8.

56. *Meigi Nenkan Hakko Toshyo Mokuroku*, no. 324–143. His full name is *Savva* (in baptism) *Mata* (given name: or *Fuku*, depending on how the character is read) *Horie* (surname). We thank Drs. Hidemi Takahashi and Sebastian Brock for this information.

57. *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel XXIII, 1, Amsterdam, 1923. See below, pp. 100–2, for further discussion of this translation.

In 1981 the Greek printed text of the Homilies was translated into *French* by Jacques Touraille[58] using Father Joachim Spetsieris's Greek edition of 1895, and in 2006 Father Placide Deseille published a new French translation of the same, noting that he also referred to the Syriac via Wensinck's English translation, and our first edition, for difficult passages in the Greek.[59]

Besides partial translations of the Syriac into Italian (1984) and French (1985), Dr. Brock mentions an English translation of his own published in 1987 that was translated into *Malayalam* in 1991 and *Persian* in 1998.[60]

In 1989 Mary Hansbury published a translation of the first six Homilies made from Bedjan's Syriac text.[61]

In 2005 the brother priests Gelasi and Zurab Aroshvili typeset and published a copy of the Georgian homilies transcribed in 1928 from another transcription made in 1903 from a parchment in the library of the Monastery of Iveron on Mount Athos.[62] The parchment includes a long introductory text that includes a request that the readers pray 'for this your unworthy and sinful servant Euthymius, who was deemed worthy to translate these holy homilies; and whatever mistakes I made, forgive me, and may God grant you grace. Amen.' The transcribers of the manuscript attest to Saint Euthymius's authorship, noting at the end, 'This book was translated from Greek by our holy Father Euthymius the Hagiorite, the translator, the Georgian.'

From an obscure mountain-top in an obscure region of Southern Persia, the writings and fame of Saint Isaac have spread throughout the world. God did not leave him under the bushel of oblivion; but because he fled the praise of men, God set him on the lampstand, shining upon the world. In his own person his words are borne out: 'Honor flees away from before the man that runs after it; but he who flees from it, the same will it hunt down, and become to all men a herald of his humility' (p. 166).

58. *Isaac le Syrien, Oeuvres Spirituelles,* Desclée De Brouwer, 1981.

59. *Saint Isaac le Syrien, Discours Ascétiques,* Monastère Saint-Antoine-le-Grand, 2006, pp. 52–53.

60. Brock, *From Qatar to Tokyo,* p. 481.

61. Mary Hansbury, *St. Isaac of Nineveh on Ascetical Life,* St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 1989.

62. Printed by the Educational Society 'Orthodox,' Tbilisi.

On the Orthodoxy of Saint Isaac and the Church of Persia of his day

The first edition of the Homilies included an Epilogue entitled *A Brief Historical and Theological Introduction to the Church of Persia to the End of the Seventh Century.*[63] Saint Isaac was and still is commonly called 'Nestorian Bishop of Nineveh,' and the Church of Persia of his day, 'Nestorian.' The Epilogue endeavored to demonstrate that the teachings of Nestorius did not inform the theology of the Church of Persia;[64] that the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia known to her were partial and imperfect translations, and that the controversy his writings caused in the Greek-speaking world were mostly unknown to the Church of Persia, cut off by linguistic differences and political boundaries; that in some cases it was extremism on the part of Monophysites that led the Church of Persia to take a stance that might seem to lend itself to a Nestorian interpretation, such as the cautious avoidance of the term *Theotokos* to avoid Monophysite Theopaschism, though she professed the Virgin's Son to be perfect God and perfect man;[65] and that fraternal relations with Byzantium remained open:[66]

63. A digital scan of this Epilogue is available from the Monastery's web site.

64. We quoted Fr. Georges Florovsky's observation that the term 'Nestorian' as applied to the Persian Church 'was then a mark of disparagement, probably first thought up by the Monophysites. In truth, the chief authority was Theodore of Mopsuestia, not Nestorius . . .' (p. 538, n. 274.) We here add: 'Macomber maintains that not even the christology of Nestorius as refracted in Theodore of Mopsuestia is "central or essential" to the theological synthesis of East Syrians, even though "officially adopted by the Church of Persia." See W.F. Macomber, "The Theological Synthesis of Cyrus of Edessa, an East Syrian Theologian of the Mid-Sixth Century," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964) 5,' quoted by Mary Hansbury, op. cit., p. 9.

65. See the Epilogue, p. 539, n. 281. We have included Bedjan's Syriac Homily 54 as Homily III in Appendix A, which was omitted from our first edition. Here St. Isaac says of 'the blessed Mary, who is blessed among women' that 'she is beyond compare, and above the order of created beings' (p. 546). It is hard to conceive of a Nestorian saying such a thing.

66. In *Syriac into Greek at Mar Saba*, Dr. Brock discusses on pages 202–4 'evidence for harmonious relations between the Church of the East and the Orthodox Church,' which 'can be seen from the meeting between Heraclius and the Catholicos Isho'yahb II in 630 (which nearly resulted in an official theological concordat between the two churches), or from the passing remark in the account of the return of the relics of St. Anastasius the Persian martyr to the effect that the bishop Elia, sent to Jerusalem by the catholicos of the Church of the East with a letter to Heraclius, was "entirely orthodox" (*pany orthodoxon*). We also learn of a monk of the Church of the East, Mar Iohannan, who, after visiting Jerusalem and Scete, spent two years at the shrine of the Head of

no general and hardened opposition to the Fourth Council created a final division between the Church of Persia of Saint Isaac's day and the 'Chalcedonian' Church, as it did for the Monophysites, for whom rejection of the Council of Chalcedon became a defining element of their identity. Its aim, in a word, was to show that the Church of Persia to which Saint Isaac belonged was neither heretical in theology nor schismatic in confession.

Whatever help or edification the modest Epilogue brought to the faithful in the quarter-century since it was published, it has, unsurprisingly, made no impression on the scholarly community. The majority continue to identify the Saint according to current academic convention, though there also seems to be the notion here and there that a point will be scored against the 'exclusivity' of the Orthodox Church if it can be demonstrated that she venerates a Nestorian as a Saint. The abundance of footnotes to this Introduction indicates our respect for the value of scholarship. But it has its limits, and the most pertinent commentary on those limits is the subject of this book's own Homily Fifty-two on the *Three Degrees of Knowledge*. The First Degree, which he associates with love of the body, is what we would call materialistic in approach; it is confined to what the senses can quantify and analyze, and is never free from uncertainty and fear. The Second Degree is concerned with love of the soul, with faith, with prayer; this initiates the purification of the mind so that it can grasp by faith that which is beyond perception by the senses alone. The Third Degree is revelation, when the grace of the Holy Spirit guides the purified mind and heart and introduces it to mysteries that cannot be expressed in words.

The Saints reached this third degree of knowledge, and through their lives, teachings, and writings, they have used human language to communicate to us, in the measure we are able to receive it, what transcends our experience; they are trustworthy guides to what is be-

John the Baptist in Homs and who was even ordained priest by the (Chalcedonian) bishop of Homs,' pp. 202–3. On p. 207 he observes, 'whereas the names of both [*the Monophysite leader*] Philoxenus [*of Hierapolis*] and John the Elder [*i.e. Dalyatha*] have been either disguised or left anonymous in the Greek, that of Isaac, together with the name of his episcopal see, has been allowed to remain.' This strongly suggests that among the Greek-speaking Orthodox, neither the name of St. Isaac, nor of the Church of Persia as figured in the name of the see of Nineveh, was associated with heresy.

yond us. Their experience, taken as a whole, instructs us in the mind and will of God, and is the conscience of the Church. Where the Saints have passed sentence, where we have the pronouncements of Third Degree Knowledge – that is, revelation – then First Degree Knowledge, which includes all the investigations of the scholarly world, must give way.

In Saint Isaac's regard we have such pronouncements. We noted above that the Saint's writings are quoted 'by nearly all the writers of the hesychastic movement of the fourteenth century.' And he is referred to by them as Saint (ἅγιος, ὅσιος). The reader will see below how highly Saint Paisius Velichkovsky prized the writings of this man he also called 'Saint.'

Almost two decades ago we asked our Abbot and spiritual father why Emperor Theodosius II is revered as a saint; first he supported Nestorius, then Eutyches; he put away his innocent wife Eudocia on unsubstantiated suspicions, and died by a fall from his horse. We have never forgotten his answer, which satisfied us beyond anything we expected. He said that the consciousness of the Church at the time knew him to be a saint and recognized him as such. If we begin, with our limited human reasoning, trying to second-guess the mind of the Church, then we will be left with nothing.[67]

Saint Isaac insists on the pre-eminence of the mystery of faith over investigative reasoning; without it, there is no Christianity. The Church, her life in the world, her teachings, her traditions, all partake of mystery: they are not reducible to analysis by human reasoning, and do not need anything, except faith and obedience, to be supplied by us, because they are not defective. The Holy Fathers had great gifts from God and could discern the truth by the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit. We who have received no such gifts have two choices: we follow in the footsteps of our Fathers, which lead to God, or else we imagine ourselves able to discern better than they, and we follow our own notions elsewhere.

Saints Cyril of Philea, Peter of Damascus, and Euthymius of Iveron, the hesychast Fathers of the fourteenth century, Saints Nilus

67. The same answer can be given to the claim that St. Arethas and the Martyrs of Najran were Monophysites, that the 42 Martyrs of Amorion were Iconoclasts, or that St. Constantine the Great is revered as a Saint for political reasons. The sincere and fervent piety of St. Theodosius II is attested to in many lives of Saints (e.g. the Seven Youths of Ephesus), and it was he who convened the Third Ecumenical Council in 431.

of Sora, Paisius Velichkovsky, and Seraphim of Sarov, in our own day the sanctified Elders Joseph the Cave-dweller and Ieronymos of Aegina – all the Saints that we know to have encountered Saint Isaac have unanimously considered him a Saint and trusted guide to salvation. Once we have determined this, then the line demarcating the expressed mind of the Church on Abba Isaac is clearly drawn. All that remains is to decide upon which side of it we wish to stand.

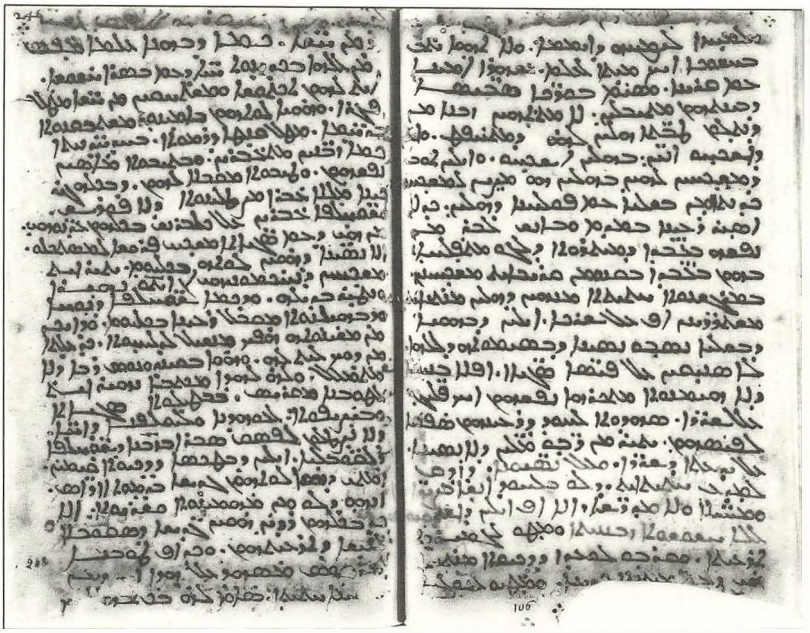
On the Text of the Ascetical Homilies

The Syriac Text

The Syriac text has come down to us in two quite different manuscript traditions, denominated the *Eastern* and the *Western*. The former has been reproduced in Paul Bedjan's[68] edition *Mar Isaacus Ninivita, De Perfectione Religiosa*, printed by Otto Harrassowitz in 1909. Bedjan based his edition on a manuscript transcribed in A.D. 1235 which he found at Mardin (now in Turkey); although he consulted other Syriac manuscripts as well, he rarely cites the variant readings.[69] We refer to this edition as the *Syriac printed text*. The

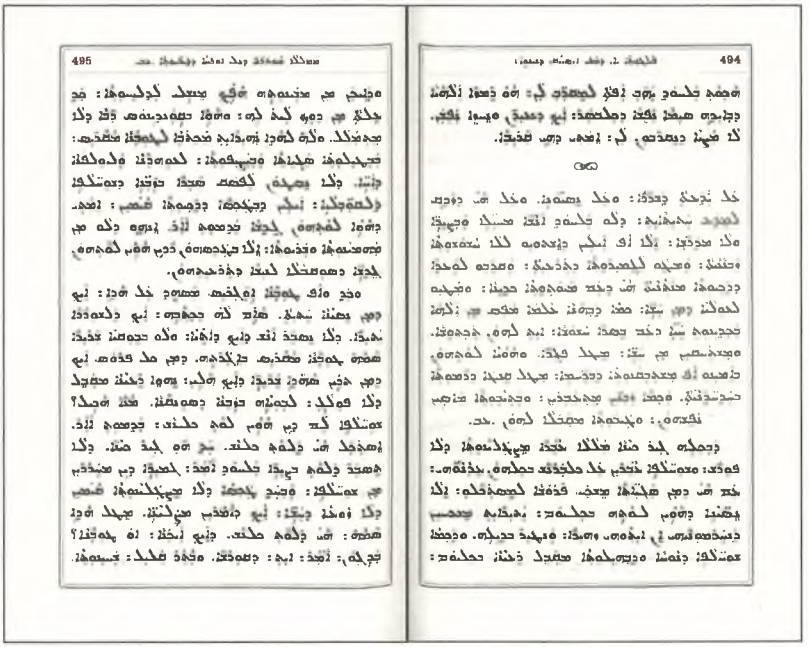
68. Fr. Paul Bedjan, 1838–1920, was born at Khosrova in Persia of a Chaldean Catholic family. At the age of eighteen he entered the seminary of the Lazarists in Paris, where he was ordained priest in 1861 and went back to Persia. In 1880 he returned to Europe where he lived the rest of his life. Being a native speaker of Syriac, and having many scholarly resources at his disposable, and even a printing press, he seems to have been singularly well suited to edit the Syriac texts of St. Isaac. Among his other publications are the seven-volume set of the Syriac *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* and the five-volume collection of the homilies of Mar Jacob of Serug.

69. Bedjan recounts in his introduction that after hearing St. Isaac highly spoken of, he obtained a manuscript from Alqosh, 30 kilometers north of Mosul; then he obtained another from Mosul. Sent to Rome, he took the opportunity to examine two manuscripts in the Vatican, which he had photographed and took back with him. Two years after that, on a trip to London, in preparing the edition of the homilies of Mar Jacob of Serug, he found parts of the writings of St. Isaac in two manuscripts in the British Museum. Despite all this, he was not satisfied, and obtained another old manuscript from Seert (Siirt) in Kurdistan, which he collated with the others and took notes. Finally he requested the 'celebrated' manuscript of Mardin, upon which he based the text of his publication. It was on parchment, written at Valtou and finished at Tiari in southern Kurdistan in 1235. Only two leaves were missing, and of all the texts he examined he found it to be the most authentic and complete. He also obtained a manuscript from Urmiah. Apparently he did not find the variant readings among his manuscripts particularly significant: 'Had I chosen to reproduce all the variants in the manuscripts, my publication would have been excessively burdened by them, and to no purpose, as it seems to me' (p. vi). The entry on him in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* ends by saying of his scholarship, 'Without furnishing the variant readings that he possessed, or justifying



Vatican Syriac 124, © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

The titles in Bedjan's text (below), printed in red (lighter ink), are separated from the preceding homily; in the MSS such as Vat. Syr. 124 (above), they are not. Both show the title of Homily 69, the longest in the book. Vat. 124 gives the first four lines in lighter ink (bottom right), then reverts to black in mid-sentence for the rest of the title, which continues on to the next page, above left.



Western manuscript tradition is represented by the Sinai ninth or tenth-century MS known as Syriac 24, and by two Vatican MSS: Vat. Syr. 125 (10th cent.) and Vat. Syr. 124 (14th cent.). The libraries of the Middle East and the West still hold numerous Syriac manuscripts which have yet to be studied.

The chief points of difference between the Eastern and Western families of Syriac manuscripts are: (1) the Eastern have numerous passages and eight homilies which are lacking in the Western; (2) the Western have a few passages not found in the Eastern; and (3) in the Eastern manuscripts there are a number of quotations attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia, Diodore of Tarsus, and Evagrius, which in the Western manuscripts are attributed to other authors, such as Abba Martinian (Homily 9), Saint John Chrysostom (Homily 47), and the blessed Cyril (Homily 51).[70] In addition to these points, slightly variant readings of the same text occur, resulting, for the most part, from the errors of transcribers.

Until an exhaustive critical text is prepared, employing all known Syriac manuscripts, it is impossible to make a final judgment on the Eastern and Western recensions. It seems very probable, however,

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his choice of this or that reading, he conscientiously edited his works according to the best manuscripts known to him, and of which his prefaces, written in French, note the worth in detail. While not being presented as critical texts, his editions are judicious and highly esteemed.' (*DS* I, col. 1329)

70. That St. Isaac should cite Evagrius does not mean that he partook of his errors, any more than Ss. Nicodemus the Hagiorite and Macarius of Corinth did, because they chose to include writings by him in the *Philokalia;* and they must have seen, as St. Isaac did not, St. John Climacus's allusion to him: 'Evagrius, afflicted by an evil spirit, imagined himself to be the wisest of the wise both in thought and expression. But he was deceived, poor man, and proved to be the most foolish of fools,' *Ladder of Divine Ascent,* Step 14:12 (Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA, p. 99). In *The Art of Prayer,* Bishop Theophan the Recluse refers his reader to the texts of Evagrius in the *Philokalia,* and himself quotes Theodoret of Cyrrhus, whom he calls 'Blessed Theodoret,' five times. The names of Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Eusebius of Caesarea are not free of the tinge of heresy, yet the first is our sole source of information for many Saints in the Synaxarion, while the second is relied upon as our principal source for the life of St. Constantine the Great. Finally we note that the first *Philokalia* was that compiled by the Cappadocian Fathers from the sound teachings of Origen. That the Saints, and even Church Fathers, sometimes cited teachers involved in heresy is not to be used against their Orthodoxy as guilt by association. It should also be emphasized that the suppression of names such as Evagrius and Theodore of Mopsuestia was done in the Western Syriac text; the Greek translators only translated what they received.

that the Western manuscripts lack most of the said passages and homilies because the original manuscript of this family was defective; for this reason, the majority of these come at the end of the text, where codices frequently suffer damage. Furthermore, evident interpolation in the Western text can be seen on page 140, note 14 of the present translation. The phrase 'out of (*men*, ἐκ) both,' that is, the two natures, was the formula finally rejected at the Council of Chalcedon in favor of 'in two natures,'[71] whereas those who did not accept Chalcedon (who, for the most part, eventually became Monophysites) adhered to it.[72] There can be no doubt that the Eastern recension has the original reading. In the matter of the patristic quotations, it is very likely that the Eastern text has preserved the correct references. Theodore of Mopsuestia was the most fully translated and widely read Greek author in Persia, and it should not be surprising if Saint Isaac quoted this authority, the 'Interpreter' (i.e. of Scripture) as Theodore was called. Howbeit, because the works of Theodore and Diodore cited in the Eastern version survive only in fragments or not at all, it is extremely difficult to verify the citations.

The order of the homilies is nearly uniform in both Eastern and Western manuscripts. Although most of the homilies have no direct bearing on those which go before and after, it is evident that they were written, or arranged, in more or less the order that they are found in the Syriac text. This is evident from the following: the note in the Syriac manuscripts informing us that the first six homilies form a single volume; in Homily 6 (p. 177) Saint Isaac promises to speak later of the 'successive order of [*monastic*] disciplines,' which he does in Homily 18 (pp. 217–18); the first words of Homily 35 refer to the last paragraph of Homily 34; in Homily 47 (p. 361) he quotes what he wrote in Homily 46 (p. 357) with the words 'Concerning this we have written . . .'; and in Homily 76, the next to last homily, he writes, 'For in every place we exhort you to this work, and we do not now oppose what we have said elsewhere. . . . I recall that in many places I have said . . .' (p. 532).

71. See Hefele, *History of the Councils of the Church* 3 (Edinburgh, 1883), pp. 348–9, note 1.

72. I.e. the "diakrinomenoi." See W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 144.

Saint Isaac's Syriac varies from free-flowing and graceful, to brisk and aphoristic as if taken straight out of the Book of Proverbs, to extremely dense and obscure, as his subject changes. Because of his enigmatic passages and the subtlety of the subjects with which he deals, he has been regarded as one of the most difficult Syriac authors;[73] yet his writings have been beloved and sought out wherever they were known of. Whether in the original Syriac, or in a translation of a translation of a translation, one does not read long before coming upon one of his characteristic turns of speech that assure us that it is Abba Isaac speaking.

The Greek Text

The Greek translation of the Ascetical Homilies was made by Patrick and Abramius, monks of the Monastery of Mar Sabbas situated near Jerusalem. In the title preceding the Greek translation they are called 'philosophers' as well as 'hesychasts,' which implies that they were well versed both in secular as well as patristic Greek writings. One may suppose that Syriac was their native tongue and that therefore they were either Syrians from the region of Damascus, or Northern Palestinians, who received a Greek education in one of the large cities of that area. The Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris possesses a ninth-century manuscript of the Greek translation,[74] and other ninth-century fragments have been identified by Kurt Treu.[75] Hence, it is evident that the Greek translation was made at the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century.[76]

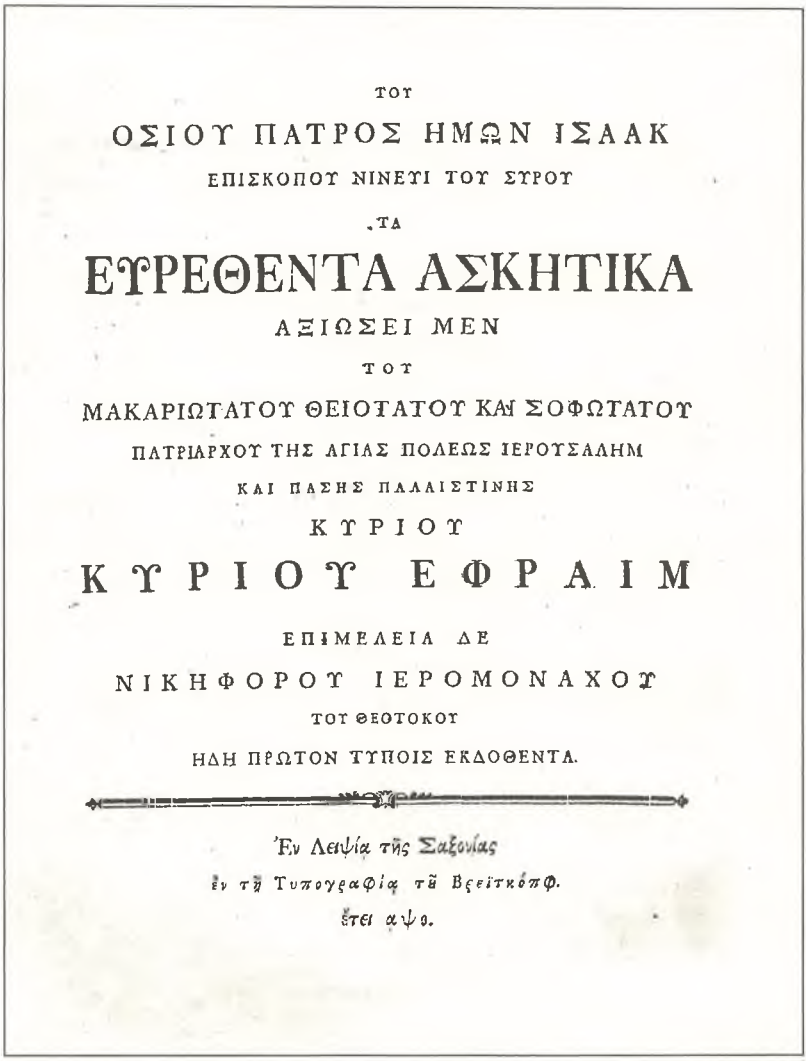
As noted above, the Greek translation was made from a Western Syriac manuscript. However, numerous short passages and even homilies found in the Western Syriac manuscripts are lacking in the

73. J. B. Chabot, op. cit. p. 63.

74. MS 693.

75. Proceedings of the Oxford Patristic Conference 1975, yet to be published in *Texte und Untersuchungen.*

76. Dr. Brock writes, 'The earliest witness to the Greek translation of Isaac's writings happens to be a ninth-century fragment which was discovered at the beginning of this century [i.e. the 20th] in the Qubbat al-hazna of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.' *From Qatar to Tokyo,* p. 477. The Umayyad Mosque, or Great Mosque, of Damascus was built on the site of a church dedicated to St. John the Baptist and contains a shrine with his holy head. *Qubba* in Arabic means *vaulted chamber, domed shrine.* The word entered Spanish as *alcoba* (*al* = *the*), and through French it entered English as *alcove.*


ΤΟΥ

ΟΣΙΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΣΑΑΚ

ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΥ ΝΙΝΕΥΙ ΤΟΥ ΣΥΡΟΥ

ΤΑ

ΕΥΡΕΘΕΝΤΑ ΑΣΚΗΤΙΚΑ

ΑΞΙΩΣΕΙ ΜΕΝ

ΤΟΥ

ΜΑΚΑΡΙΩΤΑΤΟΥ ΘΕΙΟΤΑΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΣΟΦΩΤΑΤΟΥ

ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΠΟΛΕΩΣ ΙΕΡΟΥΣΑΛΗΜ

ΚΑΙ ΠΑΣΗΣ ΠΑΛΑΙΣΤΙΝΗΣ

ΚΥΡΙΟΥ

ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΕΦΡΑΙΜ

ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ ΔΕ

ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΥ ΙΕΡΟΜΟΝΑΧΟΥ

ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ

ΗΔΗ ΠΡΩΤΟΝ ΤΥΠΟΙΣ ΕΚΔΟΘΕΝΤΑ.

Ἐν Λειψίᾳ τῆς Σαξονίας

ἐν τῇ Τυπογραφίᾳ τοῦ Βρειτκόπφ.

ἔτει αψο.

Nikephoros Theotokis's Greek printed text, commissioned by Patriarch Ephraim of Jerusalem and printed in Leipzig in 1770.

Greek. It has been suggested that the Greek translators simply omitted difficult and obscure passages.[77] This cannot be demonstrated. The Greek, indeed, lacks a few very difficult passages, but it includes many other equally difficult passages. Further, there are as many clear passages lacking in the Greek, some quite short, others longer, which the translators could have had no reason to omit. The absence, then, of these passages was probably caused by lacunae and illegible sections in the Syriac manuscript which the translators possessed.

77. J. B. Chabot, op. cit. p. 63. Here he also suggests that they divided the work into two parts, each translating half.

The Greek translation of the Ascetical Homilies is renowned for both its simple beauty and its obscurity; in this it reflects the Syriac original. In general, the translators strove to render the Syriac as literally as possible, which, unfortunately, added considerably to the unclarity of the text. Because of this, and other subsequent factors, the enigmatic character of the Greek has been a source of tribulation for many generations of monks. The causes of this obscurity must be investigated. Nikephoros Theotokis, the editor of the Greek printed text, writes in his introduction:

> We see a great deal of uncouthness in the translation of the Homilies, perhaps because it was executed literally, and also that it in no wise corresponds to the rules of grammar. For this reason obscurity reigns in many passages of the Homilies.[78]

The illustrious Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, when examining the difficulties of the Russian translation of the Homilies and comparing them with the Greek printed text, commented:

> The [*Greek*] translator was probably not well educated and did not know the rules of grammar, for which reason he confused words, and in place of the proper expression he wrote down incorrect and obscure words. From the copyists, too, mistakes and impossible words have slipped in.[79]

To take one simple illustration of this obscurity, we read on p. 477 of the Greek printed text:

> It is my opinion that our mind has the natural power to be moved to the vision of Divinity. And in this one deficiency we are the peers of all the celestial natures, for both in us and in them grace moves that which is foreign by nature both to the human mind and to the angelic.

With regard to the first sentence Nikephoros Theotokis writes a page-long footnote beginning with the words, 'See, here, how he seems to refute what he has asserted!' Theotokis tries by diverse manipulations to explain what Saint Isaac could mean by the first sentence. In many Greek manuscripts we find the same reading. The solution is, however, quite simple. The negative particle *οὐκ* was acci-

78. P. xii of the 1770 edition.

79. *Zhiznеopisaniya Otechestvennykh Podvizhnikov Blagochestiya XVIII i XIX Vekov* (Moscow, 1907), Sept., p. 487.

dentally dropped from the first sentence, as shown by the earliest Greek manuscripts and the Syriac. The sentence should read, 'It is my opinion that our mind does *not* have the natural power....'[80] This is a copyist's error.

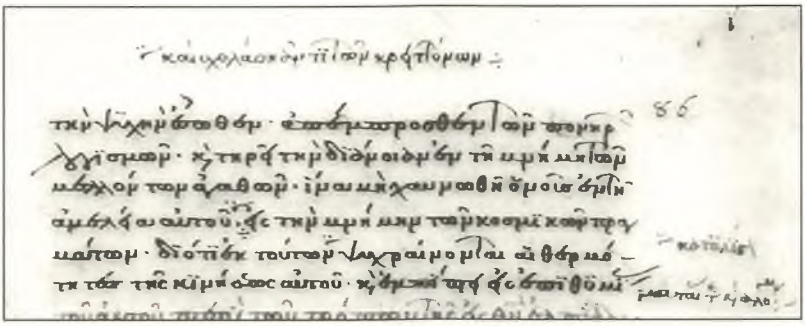
An example of the reverse process can be found on p. 41 of the Greek printed text. Here it reads, 'If you treat yourself with contempt so as not to be honored, God will expose [*or* proclaim] you publicly.' The Syriac, however, and the Paris Greek MS 693 (9th cent.) have no negative. They read, 'If you treat yourself with contempt so as to be honored....,'[81] which in the context is preferable. In the Paris manuscript one can see where the negative particle μή was written between the lines in a later hand. Subsequent manuscripts include the negative.

When the Syriac text itself is difficult, one is more apt to find scribal alterations in the Greek text, and in places they only serve to make the homily more obscure. When the Syriac is very idiomatic, one can see how the copyists struggled to clarify what was unintelligible to them.

From these examples, a few taken from hundreds that could be cited, it is evident that, for the most part, the obscurity of the Greek text originates from the literalness of the original translation and from the errors of transcribers. Often this literalness, or 'uncouthness' as Nikephoros Theotokis calls it, induced copyists to correct what they thought to be erroneous, or to clarify what they wrongly judged to be the meaning. It seems rather unlikely that the original translators were as entirely ignorant of grammatical rules as Theotokis and Metropolitan Philaret supposed. But because of the great popularity of the Homilies and their frequent recopying, many grammatical barbarisms can now be seen.[82] A further cause of gradual changes in the Greek text is the inclination of certain transcribers to rewrite what they were copying according to their own tastes. For example, the Syriac and all the Greek manuscripts we examined, with the exception of Vat. Gk. 605, read:

> The incorporeal meditation of the understanding on the love of God ... holds the mind in the remembrance of good things to come, lest the mind in its idleness should be diffused amid recollections of

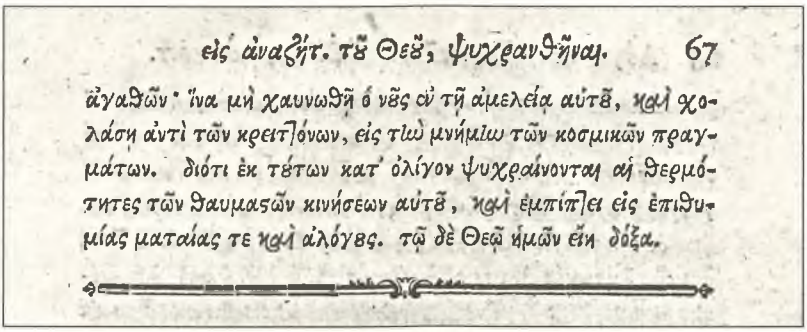
80. P. 264 of the present translation. 81. P. 166 of the present translation.
82. Nikephoros Theotokis tried to weed out many of these in his printed text.



Vatican Greek 605, © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

Above: Vatican Greek 605, showing scribal additions in the margins above (καὶ σχολάσῃ ἀντὶ τῶν κρειττόνων) and beside (κατ᾽ ὀλίγον / ματαίας τε καὶ ἀλόγους) the text.

Below: Theotokis's printed edition, made from a manuscript that incorporated the above additions into the text.



εἰς ἀναζήτ. τῦ Θεῦ, ψυχραν θῆναι. 67

ἀγαθῶν· ἵνα μὴ χαυνωθῇ ὁ νοῦς αὐ τῇ ἀμελείᾳ αὐτῦ, καὶ χολάσῃ αὐτὶ τῶν κρειττόνων, εἰς τὶω μνήμιω τῶν κοσμικῶν πραγμάτων. διότι ἐκ τότων κατ᾽ ὀλίγον ψυχραίνονται αἱ θερμότητες τῶν θαυμασῶν κινήσεων αὐτῦ, καὶ ἐμπίπ]ει εἰς ἐπιθυμίας ματαίας τε καὶ ἀλόγους. τῷ δὲ Θεῷ ἡμῶν εἴη δόξα.

worldly things, and by these the fervor of its movements should be chilled, and it should fall into desires. [p. 199]

But the Greek printed text and Vat. Gk. 605, where someone in another hand has made additions to the text in the margin, read:

> The incorporeal meditation of the understanding on the love of God . . . holds the mind in remembrance of good things to come, lest the mind grow lax in its idleness and be engaged in the remembrance of worldly matters instead of with better things. Because from these the ardors of the mind's wonderful movements grow cold little by little, and it falls into desires which are both futile and brutish. But to our God be glory. Amen.[83]

83. P. 67 in the Greek printed text.

One can find another example of this in the initial words of Homily 14. The Syriac and the Greek MSS Paris 693 (9th cent.) and 370 (10th cent.) read:

> I shall tell you something, and do not laugh (γελάσῃς), for I speak the truth; neither doubt my words, for they who have handed them down to me are true.

The Greek MS Sabbas 157 (10th cent.) reads:

> I shall tell you something, and do not ridicule (καταγελάσῃς) it, as being of no account; neither doubt in the rest of my words, for ...

The Greek MS Lavra 335 (late 10th cent.) and Vatican 605 (dated 1326) read:

> I shall tell you something, and do not disdain (καταφρονήσῃς) it, as being of no account; neither doubt in the rest of my words, for ...

The Greek MS Sabbas 407 (13th cent.) and Sinai 409 (14th cent.) read:

> I shall tell you something, and do not doubt (διστάσῃς) it; neither disdain it, as being of no account, for I tell you the truth in this homily (*or* word) and in all, for ...

The Greek printed text reads:

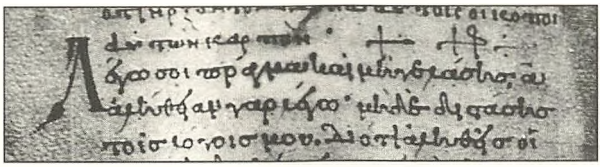
> I shall tell you something, and do not doubt it; neither disdain the rest of my words, as being of no account, for they who handed them down to me are true. I am telling you the truth, both with these words and with all I say.

Finally, another Greek MS cited in the Greek printed text reads:

> I shall tell you something, and do not doubt it, as being of no account; neither laugh at the rest of my words, for ... [*presumably the text continues as the Greek printed text*].

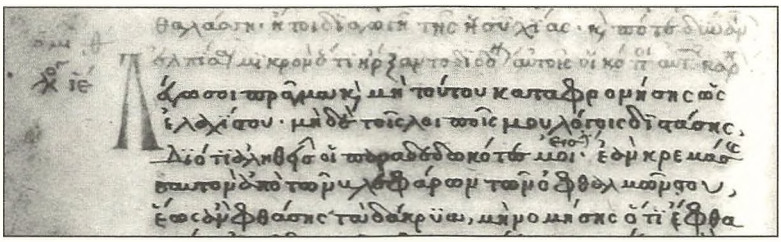
In the majority of cases where the Greek translation does not correspond with the Syriac, the cause can easily be demonstrated to be the errors and alterations of the copyists. Nevertheless, there are passages where it is almost certain that the original translation was quite free or, on rare occasions, erroneous.[84] Interestingly enough, propor-

84. One perplexing choice was made in Homily 61, "There is no man who will ... not find the time bitter wherein he is given the medicine of trials to drink" (p. 437). *Medicine* renders a Syriac word that means *drug, medicine, remedy, poison, pigment,* exactly the range of meanings covered by φάρμακον. Yet passing over φάρμακον, the Greek translators chose ἰός – *poison.*



Coislin 370, Folio 91 verso, © Bibliothèque nationale de France

Above: Paris 370, showing the same reading as the Syriac for the first words of Homily 14, 'I shall tell you something, and do not laugh . . .'
Below: Vatican 605, 'I shall tell you something, and do not disdain it . . .'



Vatican Greek 605, © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

tionately more of these cases are to be found in the first six homilies. This leads one to speculate that one of the translators was somewhat less skilled than the other, and that he translated these homilies. Howbeit, we should not be over-critical of the imperfections of the Greek translation, for in those days there were no lexicons as we now have, and translations which were much less careful were not uncommon. On the contrary, the general accuracy of the original Greek text is to be admired.

As small alterations gradually crept into the Greek text of the Homilies, so too did the ordering of the Homilies gradually change. As demonstrated above, the original ordering of the Homilies, though most have no bearing on one another, is retained in the Syriac. In the earliest extant Greek manuscript, Paris 693, the Syriac order is preserved almost exactly. Unfortunately, this manuscript breaks off at Homily 16. There are, however, later manuscripts which also essentially preserve the Syriac order. We may, therefore, conclude that the original translation held to the Syriac order and that deviations from this arose from mixing of the quires, the copying of selections of homilies and not the entire book, and from other accidental occurrences. The ordering of the homilies in the Russian translation affords an excellent example of this. Here, groups of homilies from later portions of the book are inserted between homilies

following the ancient order.[85] The order of the Russian was taken from the order of the Slavonic translation, which in turn was taken from the order found in an ancient Slavonic manuscript, and this manuscript seems to have suffered a mixing of its quires.[86] The Greek printed text, however, is a very different matter. In his introduction, Nikephoros Theotokis writes:

> Because our codices do not have the same sequence of homilies, the codex in the Royal Library having one order, while the codex cited in Assemani's volumes has another, and because the chapters having questions and answers, the epistles, and the homilies which are about the same subject, are scattered throughout the codices, for this reason it seemed right to arrange the book so that similar homilies should follow one another.[87]

Hence, the ordering of the homilies in the Greek printed text is completely different from the ordering found in any Greek or Syriac manuscript. Theotokis's idea was, perhaps, not unreasonable, but unfortunately he overlooked all the intrinsic elements which demand the original sequence. Thus, in Homily 18 of the Greek printed text, we read, 'Concerning this we have written, "That of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance"' (p. 361 of the present edition), referring to a passage in Homily 72. The Homily which should follow Homily 68 is Homily 24; and we find some homilies split in half and the halves separated, as the single Homily 32 of the present translation is Homilies 42 and 55 in the Greek printed text, and Homily 54 is 33 and 3.[88] Clearly, the ancient order is to be preferred.

The Greek text of the Ascetical Homilies also contains four homilies and one epistle which were not written by Saint Isaac. Nikephoros Theotokis was not entirely ignorant of this. He writes:

> Concerning the Homilies one should know that the second[89] and

85. See the table of equivalences, Appendix D.

86. For a more complete discussion on the Slavonic ordering, see below.

87. P. xii.

88. This separation happened because these homilies have subdivisions in the Greek MSS, and some MSS number these subdivisions as distinct homilies. Nikephoros Theotokis took each part to be entirely separate and arranged each one with other homilies on the same general subject.

89. Homily 16 of the present translation.

the seventh[90] are not the work of our Isaac, as Assemani shows. The former is the twentieth of John Saba, and the latter is his eighth homily. John Saba was a monk from Nineveh who flourished in the middle of the sixth century of the Incarnate Dispensation, and dwelt in a monastery called Dilaita (Dalyatha), situated beyond the Tigris River.[91]

Theotokis's information about John Saba, taken from Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis,* is inaccurate in almost every respect. In fact, Homilies 15, 16, 17, and 31[92] of the present translation were written by John Saba, or John Dalyatha, who lived in the eighth century.[93]

Furthermore, the Greek translation also contains a long letter entitled 'An Epistle to Abba Symeon of Caesarea.' This letter is the work of the famous Monophysite leader Philoxenus of Mabbug (Hierapolis).[94] In the Greek printed text and in all the Greek manuscripts we have examined,[95] Homily 76, the next to last, is included in the midst of the Epistle to Symeon, whereas the second and third questions of the Epistle, along with a page of Saint Isaac's seventy-sixth Homily, is separated from the Epistle and given the rightful place of

90. Homily 17. 91. Pp. xii–xiii.

92. Probably Homily 31 was originally grouped together with the other three but no Greek MS can be found to verify this.

93. For further information about this author see the references given in note 5. A little over the first half of the 'Prayer' in Homily 16 (see pp. 211–13) was put into verse by St. Cyril of Philea (+1110) and used to bring himself to compunction. *La Vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote,* ed. Étienne Sargologos, Bollandistes *Subsidia Hagiographica* 39, Brussels, 1964, pp. 71–72.

94. The proof of this is straightforward. No Syriac manuscript of the Ascetical Homilies, or of any of the works attributed to Saint Isaac, contains under his name either the four homilies of John Saba or the Epistle of Philoxenus. On the other hand, all the Syriac manuscripts that do contain the four homilies and the Epistle attribute them to the above-mentioned authors. Further, it is an easy matter to see how the translators included these works in, or appended them to, the Ascetical Homilies. The tenth-century Vatican Syr. MS 125 begins with Saint Isaac's Homilies (ff. 1–142), continues with the Epistle to Symeon (ff. 145–58), and concludes with the homilies of John Saba (ff. 158–211). Evidently the Greek translators possessed a manuscript similar to this one and, knowingly or unknowingly, added the Epistle and the selection of John Saba's homilies to the text of Saint Isaac's writings. It is possible that they indicated that these works did not belong to Saint Isaac, and later copyists omitted this information. It is also possible that the manuscript which they possessed was unclear about the authorship of these pieces.

95. Unfortunately, the Epistle is not found in the most ancient MSS owing to their mutilation.

the homily. Apparently this occurred because the subject of the homily and the subject of this part of the Epistle are quite similar. Still, the homily does not fit in the Epistle, because here Saint Isaac writes, 'I have said these things, my brother, not so that we should neglect and despise the work of stillness; for in every place we exhort you to this work, and we do not now oppose what we said elsewhere' (p. 532). In the Greek printed text these words appear toward the beginning of the Epistle to Abba Symeon, where the author has nowhere exhorted Symeon to the work of stillness, or could somehow be opposing what he had said 'in every place.' Finally, the inserted homily ends abruptly with the word 'Amen,' which is quite out of place in the middle of the Epistle.

Although the Greek translation of the Homilies quickly became a central patristic text for Orthodox monastics and laymen, it was not printed until 1770. The illustrious Patriarch of Jerusalem, Ephraim, found in the Monastery of Mar Sabbas a manuscript of the Ascetical Homilies which he loved to read whenever he stayed there. Likewise, when he passed some time in the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Corfu, he eagerly read another manuscript of the Homilies which he found there. His love for the book and his wish to benefit the Christians, and especially the monks dwelling in Palestine, Mount Athos, and the monasteries of Greece, led him to commission the learned priestmonk Nikephoros Theotokis[96] to edit the book and oversee its publication. Although Theotokis was probably acquainted with manuscripts found in Palestine, for the edition he employed two manuscripts 'of an old hand' – probably fourteenth or fifteenth century – which belonged to Neophytus, teacher and hierodeacon from the Peloponnese, and the sacred preacher Agapius, presbyter of the Church of St. Nicholas in Galata of Constantinople. The reason for this seems to be that Theotokis was living in Constantinople at the

96. Nikephoros Theotokis (1731–1800) was born in Corfu and educated in the universities of Bologna and Padua. He was tonsured a monk in Corfu in 1748 and was ordained hieromonk in 1754. In 1758 he set up a school in Corfu to teach the liberal arts and sciences; in 1765 was appointed preacher in Constantinople by Patriarch Samuel; in 1776 was invited to Russia by Eugene, Archbishop of Slavyansk and Cherson, whom he succeeded as Archbishop in 1779; in 1786 was appointed Archbishop of Astrakhan. He retired because of ill health in 1792, and was appointed abbot of the Danilov Monastery in Moscow, where he lived out the rest of his days and was buried.

time and no better manuscripts were accessible to him. This is lamentable, as these manuscripts were clearly late ones, having many scribal errors and divergences from the original text. Nikephoros Theotokis strove to produce the best edition he could, supplying copious footnotes to help the reader through obscure sections. He writes:

> To the extent of our powers we have endeavored – not according to our own independent opinion, but at the bidding of the most blessed Patriarch – to remove the obscurities, along with the disagreement in meaning found in certain places, by means of footnotes, and we have emended not a few of the obvious and easily correctable barbarisms.[97]

He was not the first to emend the 'barbarisms' of the text, and it is certain that some of his emendations, though making for more readable Greek, brought the text further away from its original meaning. Despite these deficiencies, his edition was an admirable accomplishment for the time and exhibits both great erudition and scrupulous care in preparation. Because the Ottoman authorities did not allow the publication of Christian books in their empire, it was published in Leipzig with funds provided by Patriarch Ephraim. Apparently the printing was small, and the copies were immediately distributed among the monasteries of Greece and Palestine, one also being sent to the Elder Paisius Velichkovsky in Moldavia, and a few to Russia. The book soon became extremely rare, so rare, in fact, that none of the great libraries in Europe possess a copy of this edition.

In 1895 it was republished by the well-known spiritual figure, Hieromonk Joachim Spetsieris. This edition has a great many typographical errors and has now become rare as well.

Because of the difficulty of the patristic Greek, in 1871 Fr. Kallinikos of the Monastery of Pantokrator on Mount Athos translated the text into more modern Greek and published it with the aid of the monastery. From a literary point of view his translation is excellent; while reading easily and cogently, it preserves the beauty of the ancient Greek text. However, to accomplish this he greatly sacrificed the meaning: obscure and difficult passages were simply omitted or glossed over, making his translation in some places a mere paraphrase. This he acknowledges in his introduction when he writes:

97. P. xii.

> From the beginning of this work to the end I have at times employed a literal rendition, at times a rendition according to the sense, and at times I have employed both methods; furthermore, some things have been left out or condensed where necessity or clarity demanded it.[98]

Even so, his version has been warmly received by Greek readers. In 1966 it was reprinted by Astir Publishing Company, and in 1976 an offset reprint of the first edition was published by Rigopoulos Publishing Company.

In 1991 the publishing house *Byzantion* in Thessalonica printed an edition displaying the Greek of the 1770 Theotokis printing with a new translation into modern Greek by Panagiotes Christou.[99]

The Slavonic and Russian Translations

As mentioned above, the Slavonic translation of the Ascetical Homilies was made from Greek in the early fourteenth century. This is evident from the fact that no Slavonic manuscripts exist which indisputably can be assigned to an earlier century.[100] The earliest dated manuscript is held in the library of the Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos; it was copied in the year 1364.[101] There also exist numerous Slavonic manuscripts – written with Serbian/Bulgarian orthography – dating to the second half of the fourteenth century. Consequently one may, perhaps, ascribe the translation of the Homilies to one of the Serbian/Bulgarian disciples of Saint Gregory of Sinai, who left Mount Athos for Mount Katakryptomeni (Skrytnaya) in Bulgaria in 1338, or thereabouts.[102]

From a fourteenth-century manuscript once held in the library of Count A.S. Uvarov we can determine that the Slavonic translator used an early Greek manuscript which essentially retained the ancient

98. P. x.

99. Volume 8A in the series ΕΠΕ *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Νηπτικῶν καὶ Ἀσκητικῶν, Πατερικαὶ ἐκδόσεις Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς.*'

100. J. B. Kireevsky claimed the existence of Slavonic MSS of the 12th and 13th centuries (*Complete Works* [Moscow, 1861] Vol. I, pp. 198–99) but one may question whether his information was correct.

101. Slav. MS 28 in Tachiaos, *The Slavonic MSS of St. Panteleimon's Monastery* (Los Angeles, 1981).

102. See the excellent work by P. A. Syrku, *K Istorii Ispravleniya Knig v Bolgarii v XIV Veke* (Variorum Reprints, 1972), Vol. I, p. 107.

order of the homilies. If, for the sake of illustration, we identify the first twenty homilies of this manuscript by the numbers employed in the present English translation, we find their sequence to be as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 12, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.[103] Here only Homilies 7 and 12 have lost their place. The Russian translation, which presumably derives its order from the Slavonic used by Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, has this order: 1, 2, 3, 9, 15, 17, 21, 23, 26, 28, 29, 31, 37, 43, 44, 51, 52, 53, 54, 57.[104] This deviation from the original order in the Slavonic manuscripts may have been caused by a misplacement of quires.

Because of its popularity, the Slavonic text of the Ascetical Homilies was frequently recopied, and as a result of both the obscurity of the original and the ineptitude of the transcribers, many errors crept into the text. Thus, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the text in later manuscripts had become quite unintelligible in many places. In his letter to Archimandrite Theodosius of the St. Sophronius Monastery in Russia, Saint Paisius Velichkovsky writes the following about Slavonic translations of patristic writings in general, and Saint Isaac's Homilies in particular:

> But when I spent several years reading these texts with assiduity, in a very great many places I found in them unspeakable obscurity, and in very many places I could not even discover the grammatical sense; and though many times I re-read them with inexpressible labor and scrutiny, even so, I could not grasp the sense. God alone knows with how much sorrow my soul was filled, and being at a loss what to do, I conceived the idea that to no small degree one could correct the Slavonic patristic texts against other Slavonic copies [*of the same text*]. ... In six weeks, laboring day and night, I corrected the book of Saint Isaac the Syrian against a copy of the same text which, as I had been told, corresponded completely with the Greek. But my labor proved to be in vain, for after a time I came to understand that I had ruined my better text with a worse one.[105]

103. MS 220 in *Opisaniye Slaviano-Rossiiskikh Rukopisei Grafa A. S. Uvarova*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1893), p. 162.

104. Numbers 21–31 are actually in the same order as the ancient Greek, but this is not apparent here because homilies found only in Syriac have been added to the English translation.

105. *Zhitiye i Pisaniya Moldavskago Startsa Paisiya Velichkovskago* (Moscow, 1892), p. 198.

Because of this deplorable state of affairs, Saint Paisius yearned to correct, or, if necessary, completely retranslate the Slavonic text of the Ascetical Homilies. The history of this retranslation is given by Saint Paisius himself in the foreword to his version and merits to be quoted at length.

A Brief Explanation Concerning the Translation of the Text of Saint Isaac the Syrian From Greek[106] *into the Slavonic Tongue*

While I was still residing with a small number of brethren on the Holy Mountain Athos in the Skete of the Holy Great Sovereigns and Equals-to-the-Apostles Constantine and Helen, which lies near the Monastery of Pantokrator, I possessed a volume of Saint Isaac the Syrian. In my youth I had copied out a part of this book at the Kievo-Pechersk Lavra, and it was completed on the Holy Mountain at my request by the hand of a certain zealous monk; I have it even now. As I repeatedly and attentively read this book while on the Holy Mountain, I found many places where there was no grammatical sense at all and I was unable to grasp the meaning; next to these places I made certain signs in the margin with the hope of correcting them if a better version should be found.

After some time, a certain hieromonk assured me that he possessed the same book, and that his copy corresponded exactly with a Bulgarian manuscript written more than four hundred years before, and that the Bulgarian text corresponded exactly with the Greek. I believed his assertion, and desiring to correct mine from his, I begged him for the book. With no small labor I made my supposed correction in six weeks, working day and night. Howbeit, the passages I had marked could not be corrected, because they were written in that book exactly as they were in mine.

I expended the same labor and assiduity on the rest of the patristic books I possessed, correcting them against old Bulgarian copies. Nevertheless, I realized that all my labors, all my supposed correction of these volumes over a long period of time, was in vain and useless. For I clearly understood that the Slavonic patristic books I had could in no other way be corrected except against the Greek texts from which they had proceeded, that is to say, against the Greek texts from

106. Here St. Paisius uses the term *ellinogrecheskii,* which signifies 'old Greek' or 'patristic Greek' as opposed to modern spoken Greek.

which they were translated into the Slavonic tongue in olden times. Therefore, with the hope of correcting the Slavonic texts, I began with painstaking diligence to learn (with God's help) the ancient Greek language and to obtain volumes either written or printed in that language.

Now I especially desired to obtain a hand-written Greek copy of Saint Isaac's book, for I never supposed that I should be deemed worthy of seeing a printed Greek version in my lifetime. Over the course of twenty years, both while I dwelt on the Holy Mountain Athos, and after I departed the Holy Mountain to go to Moldavia, where I dwelt in the holy Monastery of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, called Dragomirna, my desire to obtain a Greek copy remained unfulfilled. But after the passage of so many years, as I began to lose all hope of acquiring this book in Greek, almighty God by His grace inspired the most holy Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Kyr* Ephraim, to print Saint Isaac's book for the edification of monks who were zealous to learn from it true stillness of the inward man. He entreated the very erudite sacred teacher (*hiero-didaskalos*) *Kyr* Nikephoros, the present very reverend Archbishop of Astrakhan, who then resided in Constantinople, to undertake all the care for, and labor on, this edition. When one of the brethren of our community, who at that time was also in Constantinople, learned of this, he entreated both the most holy Patriarch, *Kyr* Ephraim, and the sacred teacher *Kyr* Nikephoros, to be so kind as to send a copy of this book to me at the Moldavian monastery of Dragomirna whenever it should be printed. The brother also related to them in detail concerning my long desire to obtain this book. Then, with the blessing of the most holy Patriarch, *Kyr* Ephraim, the sacred teacher *Kyr* Nikephoros told our brother that, 'As soon as the book is published (with God's help and the prayers of the most holy Patriarch), as a sign of my love for your Elder, I shall send him Saint Isaac's book, which he so greatly desires.' This occurred in 1768. When our brother returned to the monastery, he related all this to me, giving great joy to my soul, and with good hopes I awaited the printing. But even before I learned this, I enjoined a brother to transcribe the [*Slavonic*] copy of Saint Isaac which I had, so that it would be ready and suitable for making corrections.

In the year 1770, during the fast for Christ's Nativity, the sacred teacher *Kyr* Nikephoros fulfilled his promise and sent me a priceless gift, the printed Greek text of Isaac the Syrian. This, like a divine gift

sent by God from Heaven, I received with inexpressible joy, and I tearfully thanked God, Who fulfilled my long desire to acquire this book. Without the slightest delay, and with the assistance of God's grace, I began immediately to compare, word for word, my previously prepared Slavonic copy with the Greek printed text. My intention was to make certain corrections in the Slavonic and fully to clarify the passages I had marked as lacking grammatical sense. It was not, however, my intention to make a new Slavonic translation, because, on the one hand, I still had very little knowledge of Greek at that time, and because, on the other, I did not then have books suitable for such an undertaking, that is to say, lexicons, with the exception of Varin's lexicon. For this reason, the work I did at that time on the text of Saint Isaac cannot be called a translation, but merely a revision. When Saint Isaac's book was translated into Moldavian, I carefully compared this translation with the Slavonic text, and where I saw fit, I made a few more corrections. But because the Slavonic text is, in some places, more complete than the Greek, and these additional phrases really belong, in my opinion, to Saint Isaac, I left them in the Slavonic text, making a mark by them. Thus my labor on the correction of the Slavonic version of Saint Isaac's volume was begun in Dragomirna in 1770 and was completed in 1771.

Now I shall explain how I translated Saint Isaac's book anew from the Greek printed text and Greek manuscripts. In 1786 a Greek manuscript of Saint Isaac's work was brought to me from the Holy Mountain Athos – since my long desire to obtain this book was also known there – together with an entreaty by zealous monks to translate it. Likewise, the brethren of our community induced me by their humble supplications to undertake this work. But for several months I put off this matter, conscious of my old age, my extreme bodily frailty, the magnitude of the book, the difficulty of the undertaking (which, indeed, surpassed my abilities), and the uncertainty of the hour of my departure from this life. But, on the other hand, I considered how the unfathomable providence of God had deemed me worthy also to obtain a Greek manuscript of Saint Isaac's book (which I had so wished to acquire), one brought for the specific purpose of translation; and furthermore, I realized that after so many years I knew Greek a little better, and that I had now obtained books requisite for translating, that is, I had lexicons, and shortly before the manuscript was brought I received [*Greek*] lexicons for the Old and New Testaments. Besides

these considerations, after the manuscript was brought I became aware of an inexplicable desire to translate the text of Saint Isaac anew (for I say in all truth that I should have never entertained the thought of translating this Saint's book, if the manuscript had not been brought to me for this purpose). Therefore, reflecting over these matters, and how both zealots [*on Mount Athos*] and the brotherhood of our community were earnestly beseeching me and inducing me to take up this work, I set my hope on God and began in 1786, during the fast for the Nativity of our Lord, to translate anew the text of Saint Isaac the Syrian [*into Slavonic*].

After carefully examining both volumes, I decided to use the Greek printed text as the basis of my translation and to have the Greek manuscript as a reference. In very truth, I received great help in my translation from the manuscript, for if I had not had it, and employed only the Greek printed text, then, even though I had applied all my diligence, my translation would have been deficient in not a few places. The reason for this is that in many passages certain words or phrases are found in the Slavonic text, and likewise in the Greek manuscript, but they are absent from the Greek printed version; from this one may conclude that the ancient Slavonic translation employed a Greek manuscript resembling the one I had received. While I translated this holy book using the Greek printed text as a basis, I scrupulously checked each word with the Greek manuscript, the ancient Slavonic manuscript, and the copy I had revised in Dragomirna. Further, I carefully looked up the meaning of the nouns and verbs in the lexicons and tried to take into account, as much as possible, the special characteristics of both languages. In this manner, then, I made this translation (which my soul had so long desired) with great spiritual joy, disregarding the many internal and external illnesses of my sinful body. By God's grace and the all-powerful prayers of our most holy Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, and the mighty prayers of our righteous father Isaac the Syrian – the teacher of the mind's true prayer within the heart and of stillness – I completed my translation of this holy and soul-benefiting book in 1787....[107]

I also wish to declare that I have used the order of the homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian's book found in the ancient Slavonic transla-

107. A long passage follows where St. Paisius explains how he dealt with the linguistic differences between Greek and Slavonic.

tion. The order of the homilies in the Greek printed text does not agree with that of the Greek manuscript; in fact, they differ exceedingly. The Greek manuscript is divided into two parts, the first having thirty-six homilies, and the second fifty.[108] I also noticed the same order of homilies in very ancient Slavonic texts I happened to see on the Holy Mountain, and therefore I have not dared to change it, seeing that the same order is found both in the ancient Greek manuscripts and the Slavonic manuscripts, which were translated from the Greek....

According to my ability I have declared everything concerning my translation of this book. If I have, as a man, somewhere erred, I ask forgiveness with all my heart, and I humbly beseech you to correct the error with love and the spirit of meekness. The translator of this work is the Archimandrite of the Ascension Monastery of Niamets and the Forerunner's Monastery of Sekul in Moldavia, Paisius Velichkovsky, born in Poltava.[109]

Saint Paisius's concern to use the best possible text for his translation of the Ascetical Homilies represents the first attempt to free the Homilies of their obscurity by means of forming what we should call a critical text. Possessing limited sources, a Greek manuscript, the Greek printed text, an ancient Slavonic manuscript, and his own emended text had to suffice. Nevertheless, he was thus able to produce a new Slavonic translation that was vastly superior to any Slavonic text which could then be found. Unfortunately, it was not until 1812 that his translation was printed. The printing, done in Moldavia, was small and received little circulation because the Russian censor prohibited its being sold in Russia.[110] Only in 1854 was it republished by the Optina Hermitage under the direction of the Elder Macarius and with the encouragement of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow. The Elder Macarius and his assistant Hieromonk Ambrose (later the Elder Ambrose) added explanatory notes to Saint Paisius's text where obscurity still remained.

Thirty homilies were translated into Russian in the religious jour-

108. Many Greek MSS are indeed divided into these two parts. But as this division is lacking in the Syriac and in some older Greek MSS, it is evidently a later arrangement of the text, probably for the sake of convenience owing to the length of the book.

109. Introduction to St. Paisius's translation (Moscow, 1854), pp. vi–xvi.

110. See the introduction to the 1911 edition of the Russian translation, p. ix.

nal *Khristianskoe Chteniye*, years 1821, 1823, 1824, 1825, 1828, 1829, 1849, and in 1854 a complete, and more accurate, translation was published by the Moscow Theological Academy. Metropolitan Philaret, however, was not well satisfied with the new Russian translation. He said to N. P. Kireevskaya:

> I have read the Academy's translation of Saint Isaac's book. No, the translation is even more obscure,[111] it's not good. I wrote to the Rector instructing him to send me the Greek text. He sent it and I compared them.... While comparing Homily 18[112] I found the translation to be more obscure than the original [*Greek text*], and the original I likewise found unclear.[113]

The Russian translation is, indeed, quite arduous to read and is not devoid of errors. Bishop Theophan the Recluse made an extensive selection of passages from this edition, apparently retranslating a few from Greek, and placed it in the second volume of his *Dobrotoliubiye* (*Philokalia*), published in 1884.

In 1911 a new and much improved Russian translation was published by the Sergiev Posad under the supervision of the Moscow Theological Academy. Below we quote the greater part of the foreword to this edition, written by Professor Sergei Sobolevsky.

> The present edition of the [*Russian*] translation of Saint Isaac the Syrian's Homilies differs significantly from the previous editions, many changes having been made. The translation has been checked against the [*Slavonic*] translation of the Elder Paisius Velichkovsky, and in many places where they seemed to disagree in meaning, or, in general, wherever the Russian translation seemed doubtful, it has been compared with the Greek text edited by Nikephoros Theotokis (1770); in a few instances it was also checked against Greek manuscripts found in the Synodal Library of Moscow. But since the Greek text is also a translation, albeit an ancient one, made from Syriac, the language in which Saint Isaac wrote, we considered it helpful to have recourse to recent translations in Western European languages made directly from the Syriac text. Unfortunately, there are only a few homilies that have been translated from Syriac, namely 1–6, 36, and

111. I.e. than the Slavonic.

112. Homily 28 of the present translation.

113. *Zhizneopisaniya Otechestvennykh Podvizhnikov Blagochestiya XVIII i XIX Vekov*, Sept., p. 487.

47 into German in the *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*, fasc. 204–5 (Kempten, 1876), and selections from various homilies into Latin in J. B. Chabot's book *De Isaaci Ninivitae* (Louvain, 1892). For the sake of brevity, we refer to these translations simply by the words 'in the Syriac text.' In examining the previous [*Russian*] translation, we found it necessary to alter it in many places for diverse reasons: because of important misprints which corrupted the meaning, incorrect understanding (in our opinion) of the original, and cumbersome, or too antiquated, language.

In view of the fact that Saint Isaac's lofty thoughts are so difficult to comprehend, we have considered it necessary in many places to furnish the text with explanatory notes. These are partly (actually, very few) our own, but for the most part they have been taken from the notes to the 1854 edition of Paisius's translation and from the notes to the Greek text of Nikephoros Theotokis. . . .

Undoubtedly there are many deficiencies in the present edition, but we hope readers acquainted with the Greek text will forgive our oversights and mistakes, knowing how obscure this text is, the sense of which one must sometimes guess at rather than translate.[114]

It is significant that, in their endeavor to shed light on the nebulous passages in the Homilies, the Russian translators even had recourse to German and Latin translations of the original Syriac text. There can be no doubt that, had the Russian Empire continued to exist, the Russian translation would eventually have been further improved by careful comparison with the Syriac text itself.

Wensinck's English Translation

As noted above, in 1923 A. J. Wensinck published an English translation of Bedjan's Syriac text.[115] Although his version is an admirable

114. Pp. i–ii.

115. Arent Jan Wensinck, 1882–1939, was a historian of Islamic thought, Syriac mysticism, and Semitic languages. One of his goals, if not the chief, in translating St. Isaac's homilies was to demonstrate their influence on Sufi mysticism: 'But, as I have said above, it is not only in these special points, it is in his whole set of ideas that Isaac appears to be one of the Christian thinkers such as have determined the general character of sufism. In this respect he has one of the first places in the history of sufism' (p. lvi). It is not surprising that he also subscribed to the commonplace that St. Isaac, like the great mystics of all religions, transcends trifling doctrinal boundaries and small-minded orthodoxies. This ranges from discounting the significance of ecclesiastical divisions

attempt at giving a literal translation of the Syriac, it is extremely hard to read and, not infrequently, unintelligible; this is caused both by the very literalness it strives for and the fact that English was not Wensinck's native tongue. Errors also are not lacking, though errors are inevitable in translating Saint Isaac's difficult text. For example, the very first lines of the translation read:

> The fear of God is the foundation of excellence; for excellence is said to be the offspring of faith. [p. 1]

This should read:

> The fear of God is the beginning of virtue, for it [*i.e. the fear of God*] is said to be the offspring of faith.[116]

Not only does the Syriac demand that the fear of God be the subject of the second clause, but Saint Isaac elsewhere expresses the same teaching, namely, that 'faith begets the fear of God.'[117]

Wensinck himself tells us at the beginning of his preface: 'It is with a feeling of hesitation that I publish this work. I must confess that the author's intention has not always been clear to me.' Saint Isaac's Syriac can truly be quite perplexing, and if one has no personal experi-

(e.g. 'Chalcedonian' vs. 'non-Chalcedonian') to considering all religions to amount to the same thing. Wensinck nearly makes St. Isaac out to be part Stoic philosopher, part proto-Sufi. The study by Chialà mentioned before, while highly commendable for the care and thoroughness of its research, goes so far as to find parallels between St. Isaac's teachings and various Sutras (e.g. 'Keep your gaze far from the world's illusions; put no confidence in your senses; they are false. But within your body, the temple of your sensations, seek out the impersonal "eternal man." After having sought for it outside yourself in vain, you will find it within you: you are Buddha,' p. 88, n. 167. As if *Christ* and *Buddha* were two names for the same thing). The Saint's intense love for the incarnate Son of God is incompatible with a mysticism divorced from doctrine, which entails an impersonal deity, certainly not one of whom any could say, 'But the sum of all is that God the Lord surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation' (p. 492). Wensinck says, 'It is clear that Isaac simply uses the Bible and Christian dogmas as a means to support his own ideas by an outward authority.... Was there any interpreter or school of interpreters of the Bible which did not in the first place seek after their own ideas in the holy writ? These facts correspond with the mystics' aversion to dogmatical schisms; they were not interested in them, because there was no place for dogmatics in their system.... Mysticism is said to be essentially pantheistic everywhere' (pp. xxv–xxvi). Besides the not being a native speaker of English, this lack of understanding of his subject may also have contributed to the incoherencies of his text.

116. See p. 113 of the present translation.

117. See p. 361 of the present translation.

ence of what he writes about, he will find himself groping in the dark, grasping at any meaning. This problem was recognized by Bickell, the German translator of a selection of homilies. He wrote, 'It would be very desirable if a spiritual person experienced in interior life could present us with an edition of his [*i.e. Saint Isaac's*] entire works.'[118] One example from many where such experience would have helped Wensinck is the following:

> Deem me worthy, O Lord, to taste this affection in which reposes the gift of pure prayer. My saviour has reached the amazing passage through which the soul leaves the visible world and in which begin new impulses for entry into the spiritual world, and experiences of new apperceptions. [p. 304]

The reader is given no clue as to what 'this affection' might be, and it seems likely that Wensinck himself did not know. The passage should read:

> Deem me worthy, my Lord, to taste contrition, wherein the gift of pure prayer is laid up. May I attain, my Saviour, to the wondrous crossing whereby the soul forsakes the visible world and there arise in her new thoughts for entrance into the spiritual world, and the experience of new perceptions![119]

It is possible that Wensinck's 'my saviour has reached' is a typographical error, there being not a few in the publication.[120]

No translation of such a difficult work can be without deficiencies. Although its English is sometimes awkward and inappropriate, Wensinck's translation is no mean achievement. It is perhaps for this reason that Bedjan's text has not been retranslated into English, though many have complained of Wensinck's style.

The Present Translation

Our original intention was to correct Wensinck's translation against the Greek printed text, a copy of whose first edition we acquired from the Sacred Monastery of the Mother of God of Dimiova in the Peloponnese of Greece. This quickly proved to be an exercise in futility, even for producing a text only for our own private use.

118. *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*, fasc. 204, p. 290. 119. See p. 455.
120. E.g. p. 70, 'As Scripture says, "The righteous is bald as a lion."'

Wensinck's precise meaning was uncertain. The correspondence between his translation and the Greek was quite vague, and it was impossible to determine the cause of disagreement or to decide between the two. Reluctantly we became convinced of the necessity of making a new translation. We resolved to translate the Greek text, firstly because it is the text so well known to Orthodox Christians, and secondly because we had no knowledge of Syriac.

One of the two founding Fathers of our monastery, and the senior of all our translators, began in the 1960's, translating Theotokis's printed text of 1770. His work represents almost one quarter of the whole text of the homilies, and was the foundation upon which his successor built. Many of his original phrases remain, through all the following revisions and revisers, in this present edition.

As time went on, the many problems in the Greek printed text became glaringly evident. One can easily pass them over in reading, but in translating one must confront and resolve them. Having before us the example of the righteous Paisius Velichkovsky, who labored so diligently with Slavonic and Greek texts to produce a coherent Slavonic translation of the Homilies, we did not think it right to translate the obscurities of the Greek text into English without endeavoring to clarify them; we considered it our spiritual responsibility to provide the readers of our version with the most accurate and meaningful translation possible. Therefore we could not allow ourselves to guess arbitrarily at the meaning of obscure passages when means for their clarification were still available.

For this reason, then, we gradually collected microfilms of ancient Greek manuscripts of the Ascetical Homilies held in various European and Middle Eastern libraries. With the aid of these, a great many textual problems were solved, for one could easily see how many of the enigmas of the text arose from the errors and revisions of copyists. The manuscripts show a gradual departure from what must have been the text of the original Greek translation, which in all cases was closer to the Syriac. Consequently, in search of the meaning of the Greek text, the Syriac showed itself to be a most important key. It was necessary, therefore, to learn Syriac, and also to explore, to some limited extent, the Syriac manuscript tradition. A knowledge of Syriac enabled us to see how literal the early text of the Greek

translation is and also to track down reasons for the occasional divergences of the Greek from the Syriac. From the Syriac it was often possible to reconstruct the original Greek text even when the Greek manuscripts failed to provide it. And from the Greek it was often possible to divine what reading the Greek translators found in the Syriac text they possessed, though this reading was not represented in the Syriac manuscripts we examined.

As mentioned above, in both the Western Syriac and the Greek texts there are numerous homilies which lack important passages of varying lengths and, also, a few entire homilies are missing; these occur chiefly toward the end of the book. Because it is probable that the latter part of the original Western manuscript was severely damaged, we have included all these passages from the Eastern Syriac printed text, and we have placed significant homilies in Appendix A.

Glosses to aid comprehension have been added in italics and enclosed in brackets to distinguish them from Saint Isaac's text: [*gloss*].

The Present Edition

In the Introduction to the first edition, we wrote on page cii, 'For many years we have desired to see an English translation of Saint Isaac's Ascetical Homilies that might be employed by Orthodox monastics and laymen.' With this second edition we attempt to fulfill that desire.

In preparing the first edition we confronted a multitude of points – textual, historical, and theological – on which it was necessary to be satisfied, and we felt it to the reader's benefit to document many of the answers that we found, either in footnotes, or in the Introduction, Appendices, or Epilogue. The result was a hefty tome well received in academic circles, to whom in format and approach it was geared more than to the monastic or layman seeking guidance in repentance, prayer, and the love of God. One pious friend told us that he trusts the monastery's translations and felt no need for the constant distraction of footnotes discussing differences in the text; that they would be appropriate for someone studying Greek or Syriac, but not for a devotional book. And a devotional book is what we aim at now.

Thus, we have reduced the amount of footnotes by almost two-thirds. We tallied 1,231 footnotes to the homilies of the first edi-

tion.[121] Of these, some 350 were simple scriptural references, leaving almost 900 footnotes of explanation. We have reduced the explanatory footnotes to under 300, and have placed the scriptural references in the margin. The great majority of footnotes eliminated were those that gave variant readings; footnotes that helped comprehension of the text were not only retained, but added to.

We have also eliminated Appendices B and D[122] which contained texts not by Saint Isaac, and the Epilogue on the History of the Church of Persia; and we have added a Glossary, in Appendix C, of various terms used by Saint Isaac in a special sense and requiring some explanation.

This edition differs from the first in two other points. First, we have translated from Bedjan's Syriac printed text two short homilies not included in the first edition, which can be found in Appendix A as Homilies I and III. We have also added some passages that following the Greek were omitted, and expanded various passages that following the Greek were abbreviated, so that we are aware of no significant passage in the Syriac not represented here. Though this edition is shorter than the first overall, it contains more Abba Isaac.

Second, besides correcting a handful of outright mistranslations, we have revised the text here and there. Saint Isaac requires enough effort on the reader's part as it is, and in places the translation itself made the going rougher than necessary. Wherever we found we could make the meaning easier to grasp without misrepresenting or simplifying the original, we did so. In some homilies only a clause or two was changed; in others, stretches of text were reworked. In all cases we strove for greater clarity and stricter fidelity to the original. Usually the two went hand in hand, when bringing our translation closer to the original also made it easier to understand; in fact it was not infrequent that the Greek and Syriac agreed even in the details of

121. Including the Introduction, Appendices, and Epilogue yields 1,628. Chialà's 406-page work on St. Isaac, which is a straightforward scholarly study, has 1,598 footnotes. Compare with the 1,231 footnotes in our first edition, the three footnotes to the 97 pages of St. Isaac's writings translated by Kadloubovsky and Palmer in *Early Fathers from the Philokalia;* for a book of 415 pages, they used 45 footnotes.

122. Appendix B contained *A Selection from the Book of Grace* by Symeon d-Taibutha and *An Epistle to Abba Symeon of Caesarea;* Appendix D, two homilies by Mar John the Solitary.

syntax, and simply by following both more faithfully, the English became clearer. All the same, the hardy of heart who like a challenge will still find it here. Except in the case of obvious typographical errors, no revision or correction was made without consulting the originals.

We omit Appendices B and D and the Epilogue in order to produce a book that will not be too heavy for most people to hold for reading. These Appendices neither add to the corpus of Saint Isaac's work, nor are necessary for the understanding of it; and as explained above, the need for a history of the Persian Church to establish Saint Isaac's Orthodoxy is negligible when the testimony of our holy Fathers who went before us, without a single dissenting voice, have considered him a Saint. Nonetheless, we have scanned these Appendices and the Epilogue to provide them as electronic files to those desirous of the excursion.

The demand to reduce the bulk of footnotes grew among many of us who unconsciously had disciplined ourselves never to be lured to the foot of the page again, only to learn that the Greek translators read *msaibranutha* for *mbasranutha,* or that there are many readings in the MSS for the first part of this sentence, at the unwelcome price of losing the thread of what the Saint was saying, and sometimes the compunction inspired by it; details about form were smothering content. The first edition looked more as if it belonged in the stacks of a university library than in a monk's cell.[123]

We have not concealed from the reader that our translation is a composite, rendering both the Greek and the Syriac, and using more than one manuscript tradition of both. We have already observed that the Syriac text has clarified many obscurities in the Greek, corrected many misreadings, supplied many omissions. But it must also be said

123. It should be added that some of the footnotes were superfluous or even wrong. E.g., the first footnote of Homily 21, at: 'He was chaste by nature, easily entreated,[1]' indicated that the Syriac here reads 'very modest and tender-hearted' instead; yet the Greek and Syriac have the same reading. In Homily 51, at 'Sit amid lions[13] rather than amid the proud,' note 13 explained that the Greek has *lepers* instead, and that the Greek translators read 'λωβῶν for λεόντων. *β* often had a form similar to *ν*.' Yet here again both Greek and Syriac have the same reading, 'lepers.' In Syriac the word *Arya* means *lion,* a loan-word from Hebrew, but what St. Isaac has here is *Aryane* (both in Bedjan and Vat. Syr. 124), which is not the plural of *lion,* but of *leper: Aryana.* This word, depending on the short vowels given it, can also mean *Arian;* cf. note 4 in Homily 71, p. 493.

that having the Greek, and that a translation made by monks and hesychasts of Mar Sabbas, close contemporaries of Abba Isaac, approved by the Saints through the centuries, has also been an indispensable guide that made the task much easier than an unassisted translation straight from the Syriac would have been. Saint Isaac is often difficult to the point of obscurity, and the help afforded by having the Greek interpreting the Syriac cannot be overstated. It is to this that we attribute what seemed to be the general tendency, that in preparing this second edition, we found those passages and homilies that were only in the Syriac required significantly more revision than those also in the Greek. We trust it is not audacious to say that the result is a significantly enhanced text that will be of greater spiritual profit than would have been produced had we followed either the Greek or Syriac alone.

Both in revising the text and in updating this Introduction to reflect the latest scholarship, we have consulted sources in Catalan, English, French, Georgian, Greek, Italian, Latin, and Syriac. It is a cause of joy to see the study of Saint Isaac receiving so much attention. As we go to press, critical editions of the Syriac, Greek, and Georgian texts are in preparation or are projected. We cannot predict what effect their publication will have on our next printing of the Homilies, whether it will be simply the next printing, or the Third Edition; but we eagerly await them to see.

Greek and Syriac manuscripts used to establish the text

The manuscripts we used to establish the Greek text are as follows:

Paris 693. 9th century. It has 78 folios and contains 16 homilies, beginning at the end of Homily 1 and breaking off in the middle of 16.

Paris 370. 10th century. It has 182 folios and contains 30 homilies, ranging from Homily 3 to Homily 51.

Mar Sabbas 157. 10th century. It has 229 folios, 30 of which contain a selection of 10 homilies, ranging from Homily 4 to Homily 38.

Lavra 335. Late 10th century. It has 68 folios and contains 26 homilies, ranging from Homily 4 to Homily 47.

Koutloumousiou 12. 11th century. It has 242 folios, the first 90 of which contain 27 homilies, ranging from Homily 4 to Homily 57.

Sinai 405. 11th or 12th century. It has 258 folios and contains 37 homilies, ranging from Homily 38 to the Epistle to Abba Symeon.[124]

Mar Sabbas 407. 12th or 13th century. It has 423 folios, 157 of which contain all but eight of the homilies.

Vatican 605. Dated 1326. It has 280 folios and contains all but three of the homilies. This MS most resembles the Greek printed text.

Hagios Stavros 79. 14th century. It has 200 folios and contains 29 homilies, ranging from Homily 3 to Homily 37.

Sinai 406. 14th century. It has 190 folios and contains 37 homilies, ranging from Homily 38 to the Epistle to Abba Symeon.

Sinai 408. Dated 1371. It has 300 folios, the first 283 of which contain all the homilies.

Sinai 409. Dated 1374. It has 501 folios and contains all the homilies. Its text is identical to Sinai 408.

We used the following manuscripts to establish the Western Syriac text:

Sinai Syriac 24. 9th or 10th century. It has 216 folios, the first 129 of which contain Homilies 21 to 70.

Vatican Syriac 124. 14th century. It has 350 folios, the first 273 of which contain all the homilies.

The Vatican Library also possesses a tenth-century MS, Vat. Syr. 125, which contains Homilies 19–77. We did not go to the expense of procuring the film of this manuscript because it could not supply the text of the homilies lacking in Sinai 24.

For the Syriac text of the four homilies written by John Saba (i.e. 15, 16, 17, 31) we are deeply indebted to Dr. Brian Colless of Massey University in New Zealand. For his thesis Dr. Colless edited and translated the homilies of John Saba. This work, which will eventually appear in *Patrologia Orientalis,* was made available to us by the library of the University of Melbourne, Australia.[125]

124. We owe our thanks to Fr. Demetrios, Librarian of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, who microfilmed this MS for us; the film held in the U.S. Library of Congress is quite out of focus.

125. Dr. Colless's thesis, which includes the Syriac text of John Saba's homilies, can be viewed at: http://repository.unimelb.edu.au/10187/8406.

The Appendices

We have translated the homilies in Appendix A from Bedjan's Syriac text. They have not been relegated to the back because of any doubt about their authorship or significance, but to make the collection of homilies proper to correspond more closely to the Greek body of homilies that we used as our paradigm.

In Appendix B we have placed translations of two epistles of Saint Macarius of Egypt referred to in Homily 69. Saint Isaac apparently included the first in the text of his homily (p. 485), and he quotes passages from the second (on pp. 482, 483). The Syriac text with which Saint Isaac was familiar, was, of course, a translation from Greek. The editor of these texts, W. Strothmann, provides the Greek original of the first epistle, since it was hitherto unpublished. The second epistle – entitled the 'First Epistle of Saint Macarius of Alexandria' or 'The Twelfth Epistle of Saint Macarius of Egypt' – is a curious combination of passages from Saint Macarius' known texts.[126] There is, however, in the epistle a passage found only in Syriac, the very passage, in fact, which Saint Isaac quotes.[127]

Appendix C organizes into a Glossary miscellaneous terms used in a special sense by Saint Isaac or otherwise requiring further explanation, and it incorporates the discussion of terms that in the first edition were included in the Introduction. Perusing the Glossary before reading the homilies might enhance appreciation of the text.

In Appendix D we have placed the Table of Equivalences which shows the numbering of the homilies in this edition compared with the Syriac, Greek, and Russian.

All Old Testament references are according to the Septuagint text, and a scriptural index for the entire work can be found at the back.

Since the homilies of the first edition have been cited in a number of publications, we indicate the corresponding page numbers in brackets in the margin, as can be seen in the right margin here. [147]

126. That the second 'Epistle' is by St. Macarius the Great of Egypt, rather than by St. Macarius of Alexandria, is incontestable when one compares it with Homily XXVI of A. J. Mason's *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, London, 1921, e.g. §6 on p. 563 of this edition with §25 of Mason's, pp. 197–98; and §11 on p. 565 with §11 of Mason's, p. 190.

127. For a complete discussion on these texts see W. Strothmann, *Die syrischer Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios* 2, pp. xv–xxvi, xxx–xxxi.

We shall always remember with gratitude the late G.E.H. Palmer for embellishing our translation with his helpful suggestions.

We also owe thanks to Dr. Sebastià Janeras of the Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya in Barcelona, who brought to our attention the latest scholarship on Saint Isaac, and assisted us in obtaining the image of the 1497 printing of the Latin translation of the Homilies shown on page 68.

We are indebted most deeply of all to Dr. Sebastian Brock of Oxford, both for taking time to examine a number of difficult Syriac passages, and for sparing no labor to help us when we were first learning Syriac. Moreover every lover of Syriac literature owes a debt to Dr. Brock who, it would seem, has almost singlehandedly made the field to thrive because of his heartfelt and infectious enthusiasm for his subject. This has not always been the case. William Wright wrote on the opening page of his *Short History of Syriac Literature*, 'We must own – and it is well to make the confession at the outset – that the literature of Syria is, on the whole, not an attractive one. As Renan said long ago, the characteristic of the Syrians is a certain mediocrity.'[128] If Syriac studies are now more popular than they have ever been, and the research on Saint Isaac in particular is increasing, it is because those leading the way such as Brock genuinely love their subject and encourage, rather than deter, those who consider entering the field.

The Dedication page advertises our indebtedness to the Elders Joseph and Ieronymos. We leave the reader with a memorable exhortation of the latter's:

> To a certain soul who was not permitted by her spiritual father to read ascetical books, he once said:
>
> 'To all the sins you have, add one more. Buy Abba Isaac and read him every day. Maybe your spiritual father does not know, maybe he is against it. We don't know; do not judge. In any event, read Abba Isaac. You will profit much from it.'[129]

128. Pp. 1–2. The *Short History* was printed as a separate book in 1894; it had first appeared in 1887 as the article 'Syriac Literature' in vol. XXII of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Thus all Syriac literature was dismissed as dull by one of its foremost scholars.

129. *The Elder Ieronymos of Aegina*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA, 2007, pp. 141–42.

The Ascetical Homilies

BE STILL

AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

Homily 1

*On renunciation and the monastic life**

THE FEAR OF GOD is the beginning of virtue, and it is said to be the offspring of faith. It is sown in the heart when a man withdraws his mind from the attractions of the world to collect its thoughts, wandering about from distraction, into reflection upon the restitution to come.

To lay the foundation of virtue, nothing is better than for a man to contain himself by means of flight from the affairs of life, and to persevere in the illumined word of those straight and holy paths, even that word which in the Spirit the Psalmist named a lamp. Ps. 118:105

Scarcely a man can be found who is able to endure honor, and perhaps such a one cannot be found at all. This, one might say, is because of a man's sudden receptivity to change, even if he be a peer of the angels in his way of life.

The beginning of the path of life is continually to exercise the mind in the words of God, and to live in poverty. For when a man waters himself with one, it aids in the perfection of the other. That is to say, to water yourself with the study of the words of God helps you in achieving poverty, while achieving freedom from possessions affords you the time to attain to constant study of the words of God; and the help provided by them both speedily erects the entire edifice of the virtues.

No one can draw nigh to God save the man who has separated himself from the world. But I call separation not the departure of the body, but departure from the world's affairs.

This is virtue: that in his mind a man should be unoccupied with the world. As long as the senses have dealings with external things,

* In the Syriac these first six homilies form a unit, numbered 1–6 rather than each having its own title, with one title for the whole unit: *On the Discipline of Virtue* – hence the opening sentence of this first homily. This homily in particular seems to sow the seeds of many of the principal themes that will be developed throughout the book.

the heart cannot have rest from imaginations about them. Outside of the desert and solitude, the bodily passions do not abate, nor do evil thoughts cease.

Until the soul becomes drunk with faith in God by receiving a perception of the power of faith, she can neither heal the malady of the senses, nor be able forcibly to tread visible matter underfoot, which is the barrier to things that are within and beyond perception by the senses.

Reason is the cause of free will, and a fruit of both is aberration.[1] Without the first,[2] there is no second;[3] and where the second is lacking, there the third[4] is held as with a bridle.

When grace is abundant in a man, he easily scorns the fear of death on account of his longing for righteousness, and he finds in his soul many reasons for the necessity of suffering tribulation for the fear of God. All things that are thought to harm the body and that suddenly attack its nature, consequently causing it to suffer, are reckoned in his eyes as nothing in comparison with what is to be hoped for hereafter. It is not possible for us to know the truth unless temptations are allowed to come upon us; and a man's mind gives him assurance of exactly this, and further, of the fact that God takes very great forethought for men, and that there is no human being who is not under His providence, and this especially he sees pointed out as clearly as by a finger in the case of those who go out to seek Him and endure suffering for His sake. But when lack of faith is planted in a man's heart, then all we have said is found to be nearly the opposite; for him knowledge is greater than faith, since he relies on investigation; trust in God is not present in everything he does, nor is God's providence for man taken into consideration, but such a man is continually waylaid in these matters by those who 'in a moonless night
Ps. 10:2 lie in ambush to shoot down a man with their arrows.'

The beginning of a man's true life is the fear of God. But the fear of God will not be persuaded to dwell in a soul together with distrac-
[5] tion over outward things. For by serving the senses, the heart is scat-

1. *Aberration* here and elsewhere renders a Syriac word meaning *turning aside, deviation,* and more generally *susceptibility to change, inconstancy.* For more on this, and on other words used in a special sense by the Saint, see the Glossary in Appendix C.

2. I.e. reason. 3. I.e. free will. 4. I.e. aberration, deviation.

tered, driven away from delight in God; for our inward thoughts, it is said, are bound by their perception to the sensory organs that serve them.

Doubting hesitation of the heart introduces cowardice into the soul, but faith can make firm her volition even in the cutting-off of the body's limbs. In the measure that love for the flesh prevails in you, you can never become brave and dauntless, on account of the host of adversaries that constantly surround the object of your love.

A man who craves esteem cannot be rid of the causes of grief.

There is no man who, with a change of circumstances, will not be subject to a comparable change in his mind.

If desire, as it is said, is the offspring of the senses, then let them be silent who profess to keep their mind peaceful in the midst of distraction.[5]

Not he is chaste who, in the strain and crisis of combat and struggle, says that shameful thoughts cease within him, but rather he who, by the uprightness of his heart, makes the vision of his mind so pure that he cannot gaze on lewd thoughts without shame. And when the gaze of his eyes is held fast, thus bearing witness to the holiness of his conscience, then shame is like a veil that hangs over the hidden place of his thoughts, and his purity becomes like a chaste virgin being faithfully kept for Christ.

There is nothing so capable of banishing the inveterate habits of licentiousness from our soul, and of driving away those active memories which rebel in our flesh and produce a turbulent flame, as to immerse oneself in the fervent love of instruction, and to search closely into the depth of the insights of divine Scripture.

When a man's thoughts are totally immersed in the delight of pursuing the wisdom treasured in the words of Scripture by means of the faculty that extracts understanding from them, then he puts the world behind his back and forgets everything in it, and he blots out of his soul all memories that form images embodying the world. Often he

5. This refers to the heretics known as the Messalians, or 'praying people,' who claimed to reach such a state of perfection and dispassion that they could walk about in the cities and converse with all men without suffering spiritual harm or even distraction from prayer and peace of mind. In other words, their teaching was directly opposed to that of St. Isaac, and the Saint repeatedly refutes it. See, for example, pp. 243, 268, 482, and 486.

does not even remember the employment of the habitual thoughts which visit human nature, and his soul remains in ecstasy by reason of those new encounters that arise from the sea of the Scripture's mysteries.

And again, even if the mind [*only*] floats on the surface of the waters, that is, of the sea of the divine Scriptures, and its perceptions
[6] cannot fathom the great depth so as to be able to grasp all the treasures in its deep, yet even this practice in itself, by the power of its fervent love, will suffice the mind firmly to pinion its thoughts by a single thought of wonder, and to prevent them from running to the body's nature, as one of the God-bearing Fathers said. And this he says is because the heart is feeble and cannot sustain the evils that it encounters from inner and outer warfares. And you know that an evil bodily thought is oppressive. If the heart is not occupied with study, it cannot endure the turbulence of the body's assault.

Just as the heaviness of weights impedes the quick swaying of a balance in a gust of wind, so shame and fear impede the aberration of the mind. In proportion to the lack of shame and fear, there is an abundance of the dominion of liberty in the mind. And just as a decrease in the weight in the pans will be a cause for them to sway more easily to and fro, so an increase of liberty through removal of fear from the soul causes the scales of the mind to sway easily from side to side. Therefore the mind's mobility is a consequence of liberty, and mental changes are a consequence of aberration.

Be wise, then, and lay the fear of God as the foundation of your journey, and in but a few days it will bring you before the gate of the Kingdom with no windings on the way.

Do not, like the pupils of teachers, over-scrutinize words that are written from experience for the fostering of your way of life, which render your soul great because of the greatness of the insights found within them.

Discern the purport of all the passages that you come upon in sacred writings, that you might immerse yourself deeply in them, and might fathom the profound insights found in the compositions of enlightened men.

Those who in their way of life are led by divine grace to be enlightened are always aware of something like a noetic ray of light

running between the written lines, which enables the mind to distinguish words spoken simply from those spoken with great meaning for the soul's enlightenment.

When a man reads in a common way lines that contain great meaning, he makes his heart common and devoid of that holy power which gives the heart a most sweet taste through perceptions that awe the soul.

Everything is wont to run to its kindred; and the soul that has a share of the Spirit, on hearing a phrase that has spiritual power hidden within, ardently draws out its content for herself.

Not every man is wakened to wonder by what is said spiritually [7]
and has great power concealed in it. A word concerning virtue has need of a heart unbusied with the earth and its converse; for when a man's mind wearies itself with care about transitory things, the concerns of virtue do not awaken his thought to a longing and a quest to gain them.

Liberation from material things precedes the bond with God, even though often with some, through the economy of grace, the latter is found to precede the former, such that love covers love.[6] Economy's usual order is different from the order of the community of men; but as for you – keep to the common order. If grace comes within you first, that is its own affair; but if not, make the ascent of the spiritual tower by the path common to all men, on which they have journeyed one after another.

Everything that is effected through divine vision, and on account of which a commandment is fulfilled, is wholly unseen by the eyes of the body. Every virtuous action that is effected through righteous activity (*praxis*) is composite: for the commandment, which is but one (i.e. righteous activity), requires both, *theoria* and *praxis,* on account of our corporeal and incorporeal parts. For the combination of these two is one. For this reason the enlightened mind understands [*the commandment*] in a twofold manner, as formerly the blessed Moses commanded [*it*], namely, what is simple is understood as well as what is twofold.

Works having purity as their goal do not shake off the memory's

6. The meaning of this seems to be that the love of God covers the love of material things.

awareness of blameworthy deeds committed in the past, but they take the grief of the recollection away from our mind. Henceforth it happens that when the recollection passes through our mind, it does so to our advantage.

The soul's insatiability for gaining virtue seizes for its own the portion of desire for visible things that belongs to her yoke-mate, the body.

Moderation adorns all things; for without moderation, even things deemed good become harmful.

Do you wish to commune with God in your mind by receiving a perception of that delight which is not enslaved to the senses? Pursue
Matt. 5:45–48 mercy; for when something that is like unto God is found in you, then that holy beauty is depicted by Him. For the whole sum of the deeds of mercy immediately brings the soul into communion with the unity of the glory of the Godhead's splendor.

[8] Spiritual unity is an unsealed and perpetual recollection that incessantly blazes in the heart with ardent longing; and from perseverance in the commandments, the heart receives its capacity for this bond, not figuratively, nor in a natural way. For there it finds material for the soul's divine vision so as to be sustained in this [*union*] hypostatically. For this reason the heart comes to awestruck wonder as the eyes of the twofold senses close: those of the flesh and those of the soul.

There is no other path toward spiritual love, which forms the invisible image, except by first beginning to show compassion in pro-
Luke 6:36; portion to the Father's perfection, as our Lord said. For He com-
Matt. 5:46–48 manded those who obey Him to lay this as their foundation.

A word born of righteous activity (*praxis*) is one thing, and beautiful words, another. Even without experience, wisdom is clever at imparting beauty to her words, at speaking the truth without really knowing it, and at making declarations on virtue while the man himself never makes trial of it in his deeds. Speech that comes from righteous activity is a treasury of hope; but wisdom not based on righteous activity is a deposit of disgrace. Just as when an artist frescoes water on the walls and cannot relieve his thirst with it, or just as a man dreams beautiful dreams, even so is speech not based on righteous activity. But a man who talks of virtue from the experience of his

own labor transmits virtue to his hearer as he that distributes money earned from his own commerce, and as it were from out of his own possessions he sows his teaching in the ears of those who give him ear. Such a man opens his mouth with boldness before his spiritual children, even as the elderly Jacob said to Joseph the Chaste, 'Behold, I have given thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.' Gen. 48:22

This temporal life is beloved of every man whose way of life is defiled; and second to him is the man deprived of knowledge. Well has one said, 'The fear of death distresses a man with a guilty conscience, but the man with a good witness within himself longs for death as for life.' Count no man truly wise who, because of this temporal life, enslaves his mind to timidity and fear.

Let whatever good or evil things that befall the flesh be reckoned by you as dreams. For it is not only with death that you will have release from them, but often before death they retire and leave you alone. But if any of these things that befall you should have communion with your soul, then consider them to be your acquisitions in this [9] age, and they will also go with you into the next. If they are good, rejoice and give thanks to God in your mind. But if they are evil, be grieved and sigh; and as long as you are still in the body, seek to be set free of them.

Of everything good wrought within you noetically and in secret, be certain that baptism and faith have been the mediators whereby you received it; through these you were called by our Lord Jesus Christ to His good labors, to Whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, honor, thanksgiving, and worship, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 2

On thankfulness to God, in which there are also essential elementary lessons

THE THANKSGIVING OF THE RECIPIENT incites the giver to give gifts greater than the first. He that returns no thanks in small matters is a dissembler and dishonest in greater ones also. If a man is ill and he recognizes his ailment, his healing will be easy. If he confesses his pain, he draws nigh its cure. The pangs of the unyielding heart will be multiplied, and the patient who resists his physician amplifies his torment. There is no unpardonable sin, save the unrepented one. Nor does any gift remain without addition, save that which is received without thanksgiving. The fool's portion is small in his eyes.

Ever keep in remembrance those who surpass you by their virtue, so as to see yourself always as inferior to their measure. And be ever conscious of the bitter tribulations of the afflicted and oppressed, so that you may render due thanksgiving for your small and inconsequential troubles, and be able to endure them patiently and with joy.

At the time of your defeat, when you are bound both with languor and slothfulness, and subdued by the enemy in the most painful misery and wearisome labor of sin, ponder in your heart on the former time of your diligence, and how you used to concern yourself even over the most minute matters, and the valiant struggle which you displayed, and how you were stirred up with zeal against those who would hinder you in your progress. Furthermore, reflect upon the groans which you used to utter because of the small faults that you committed owing to your negligence, and how in all these things you took the crown of victory. For thus, with such and so many recollections, your soul is wakened as if from the deep and is clad with the flame of zeal. Then through fervent struggling against the devil and sin she rises up out of her sunken state as if from the dead, she is raised on high, and she returns to her former rank.

Remember the fall of the mighty, and be humble in your virtues. Recollect the grievous transgressions of those who of old trespassed and repented, and the sublimity and honor of which afterwards they were deemed worthy, and take courage in your repentance. Be a persecutor of yourself, and your enemy will be driven from your proximity. Be peaceful within yourself, and heaven and earth will be at peace with you. Be diligent to enter into the treasury that is within you, and you will see the treasury of Heaven: for these are one and the same, and with one entry you will behold them both. The ladder of the Kingdom is within you, hidden in your soul. Plunge deeply within yourself, away from sin, and there you will find steps by which you will be able to ascend. Matt. 6:6

Scripture has not explained to us what the things of the age to come are; and yet, how we might receive a perception of their delight here, without a change of nature and a translation to another place, Scripture has easily taught us. For although it does this by the names of things desirable and highly esteemed, which to us are sweet and precious, in order to stimulate us to a yearning for them, still when it says, 'which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard' and the rest, Scripture has declared to us that the good things to come are incomprehensible, and have no similarity to any thing here. 1 Cor. 2:9

Spiritual delight is not enjoyment found in things that exist substantially outside the souls of those who receive it. If it were, then the words, 'The Kingdom of the Heavens is within you' and, 'Thy Kingdom come,' would mean that we have acquired matter of a palpable nature within us as the earnest of the delight found in that Kingdom. For the thing acquired must needs be like the earnest of it, and the whole like its part. And although 'as in a mirror' indicates 'not substantially,' yet it does show clearly, in any case, the possession of a likeness. But if, as the true testimony of those who have interpreted the Scriptures says, this perception[1] is the noetic operation of the Holy Spirit, and it is a part of that whole, then – besides that spiritual operation which mediates between the Spirit and the saints through noetic perception – there is no palpable mediation by the senses for the delight of the saints yonder, [*but instead of the senses*] there are Luke 17:21 Matt. 6:10 2 Cor. 1:22 2 Cor. 3:18

1. Gk. αἴσθησις. This word also means *consciousness, sensation, awareness,* or in this sense, *experience.* This is the *earnest* of which St. Isaac speaks.

[12] only those receptacles [*of the mind*] which contain everything in a well-ordered manner. And if we should call this[2] a profusion of light, we do not mean [*light*] that is not noetic.

The lover of virtue is not he who does good with valiant struggle, but he who accepts with joy the evils that attend virtue. It is not so great a thing for one patiently to endure afflictions on behalf of virtue, as it is for the mind through the determination of its good volition to remain unconfused by the flattery of tantalizing pleasures. No kind of repentance that takes place after the removal of our free will will be a well-spring of joy, nor will it be reckoned for the reward of those who possess it.

Cover a sinner, so long as you receive no harm from him, and give him encouragement; then your Master's loving-kindness will bear you up. Support with a word the infirm and those who are grieved at heart in so far as this lies within your hands, then the Right Hand that sustains all will also sustain you. Through the toil of prayer and the anguish of your heart commune with those who are grieved at heart, and the Source of mercy will be opened up to your petitions. Weary yourself with constant supplication before God with a heart possessing a pure, compunctionate meditation, and God will protect your mind from filthy thoughts, that His way may not be defamed through you. Continuously apply yourself to the study of reading the divine Scriptures with precise understanding, lest by reason of the idleness of your mind, your sight be polluted with foreign pollutions. At a time when you think you will not be worsted, do not voluntarily make trial of your mind with lewd reflections which tempt you, because in this way wise men have been darkened and made fools. Do
Prov. 6:27 not store a flame in your bosom.

Without harsh tribulations of the flesh it is difficult for untrained youth to be held under the yoke of sanctification. The beginning of the darkening of the mind (once a sign of it is visible in the soul) is to be seen, first of all, in slothfulness with regard to the [*church*] services[3] and prayer. For except the soul first fall away from these, she cannot

2. I.e. the operation of the Holy Spirit.

3. Lit. *service* or *liturgy*. Here the chanted services established by the Church, e.g. the Hours, the Midnight Service, etc., are meant, and they are distinguished from solitary *prayer*.

be led in the way of error; but as soon as she is deprived of God's help, she easily falls into the hands of her adversaries. And again, whenever the soul becomes heedless of the labors of virtue, she is inevitably drawn to what is opposed to them. A transition, from whichever side it occurs, is the beginning of what belongs to the opposite quarter. Practise the work of virtue in your soul and do not concern yourself with futile matters. Always lay bare your weakness before God, and you will never be put to the test by aliens when you are found alone, distant from your Helper.

[13] The activity of taking up the cross is twofold, in conformity with the duality of our nature, which is divided into two parts. The first is patient endurance of the tribulations of the flesh, which is accomplished by the activity of the soul's incensive part; and this is called *righteous activity* (*praxis*). The second is to be found in the subtle workings of the understanding, in steady divine meditation, in unfailing constancy of prayer, and in other such practices; this second activity is carried out through the appetitive part of the soul, and is called *divine vision* (*theoria*). As for the first, that is, *praxis,* it purifies the passionate part of the soul by the power of zeal. And the second, through the action of the soul's love, which is a natural yearning, thoroughly filters out the noetic part of the soul. Thus every man who, before training completely in the first part, proceeds to that second activity out of passionate longing for its sweetness (or rather, should I say, out of sloth) has wrath come upon him, because he did not first 'mortify his members which are upon the earth,' that is, heal Col. 3:5 the infirmity of his thoughts by patient endurance of the labor which belongs to the shame of the cross. For he dared to imagine in his mind the cross's glory. And this is what was said by holy men of old: 'If the mind should wish to mount upon the cross before the senses have found rest from their infirmity, the wrath of God comes upon it.'

This mounting of the cross which brings wrath upon itself does not result from the first part, that of patient endurance of afflictions which is the crucifying of our flesh, but results from the desire to ascend to divine vision (*theoria*), which is the second part and takes place after the healing of the soul. A man whose mind is polluted with the 'passions of dishonor,' and who rushes to imagine with his mind Rom. 1:26 the phantasies of the thoughts, is put to silence by divine punishment,

because he did not previously purify his mind through afflictions, and subdue the lusts of his flesh. But from what he has heard with his ears, and from the ink of his book-learning, he ran ahead of himself to walk in a way filled with gloom, while his own eyes were blind. For even those whose sight is sound and who are filled with light, who have obtained grace as their guide, are in peril both night and day. Their eyes are filled with tears, and they are diligent in prayer and weeping all the day and in the night, because they fear the journey and the great precipices that confront them and the illusions of dissembling shapes found mixed with truth.

The things of God, it is said, come of themselves, without one's being aware of it. Yes, but only if the place is clean and not defiled. If the pupil of your soul's eye is not pure, do not venture to gaze at the orb of the sun, lest you be deprived of your sight – which is simple faith, humility, confession from the heart, and your small labors ac-
[14] cording to your capacity – and lest you be cast aside in a lone region of the noetic world (which is the 'outer darkness,' outside God, a figure of perdition) like that man who shamelessly entered into the wed-
Matt. 22:11 ff. ding feast with unclean garments.

From exertions and watching[4] there springs purity of the thoughts. And out of purity of the thoughts, the light of the understanding dawns. From this the mind is guided by grace into that wherein the senses have no power, either to teach, or to learn.

Think to yourself that virtue is the body, but divine vision the soul, while both are one complete man in spirit, which is united out of two parts, the physical and the noetic. And just as it is impossible that our soul should come into being and be born without the complete forming of the body with its members, so is it impossible that there be divine vision, that second soul (which is also the spirit of revelation, and is moulded in the matrix of the understanding that receives the substance of the spiritual seed), without the completion of the working of virtue; and virtue is the house of knowledge which is a host to revelations.

Divine vision is the perception of divine mysteries which are hidden in things and causes. Whenever you hear of withdrawal or aban-

4. I.e. the guarding of the mind. In Syriac there is a play on words: from *ʔeʰhirutha* springs *ʔahiyutha*.

donment of the world, or of being pure from the world, then first you must learn and understand the term *world*, not as common, unlearned men do, but in its spiritual senses, and how many different things this name comprises. Then you will be able to know your soul, how distant she is from the world, and how great an intermingling she has with the world.

World is a collective noun which is applied to the so-called passions. But if a man does not know first what the world is, he will never come to know with how many of his members he is distant from the world, and with how many he is bound to it. Many are the persons that with two or three members have parted from the world, and curb themselves with respect to these, and suppose themselves to be strangers to the world in their way of life. This, however, is because they neither understand nor prudently see that with two of their members they have died to the world, while their remaining members live within the body of the world. For which cause they have not even been able to perceive so much as their passions. And since they have no awareness of them, neither have they made an effort to heal them.

By contemplative examination, the world is also called the aggregate of the collective noun which is applied to the separate passions. When we wish to give a collective name to the passions, we call them *world*. And when we wish to designate them specifically according to their names, we call them *passions*. The passions are portions of the [15] course of the world's onward flow; and where the passions cease, there the world's onward flow stands still. These are the passions: love of wealth; gathering objects of any kind; bodily pleasure, from which comes the passion of carnal intercourse; love of esteem, from which springs envy; the wielding of power; pride in the trappings of authority; stateliness and pomposity; human glory, which is the cause of resentment; fear for the body. Wherever these have halted in their course, there, in part, to the extent that the passions are inactive, the world fails from its constitution and remains inactive. Thus it was with each of the saints, that while they lived, they were dead. For living in the body, they lived not according to the flesh. Examine in which of these passions you are alive, and then you will know in how many parts you are alive to the world, and in how many you are dead.

When you learn what the world is, by distinguishing these matters you will also come to know your entanglement in the world as well as your freedom from it. But that I may speak briefly: the world is the
Rom. 8:7 carnal way of life and the 'mind of the flesh.' Hence, a man's elevation above the world can also be recognized from these two things: from the good transformation of his way of life and from a discernment of his thoughts.

Therefore, you may comprehend the measure of your way of life from that which arises in your mind with regard to the things it muses upon in its thoughts: for which things your nature effortlessly longs, what stirrings are aroused continually, and which are caused by an accidental circumstance; whether your mind has any perception at all of incorporeal thoughts; or whether all its motions are of a material sort; and whether the mind's material quality is something passionate, or only that the thoughts are the imprints of the physical aspect of a man's virtuous labor: for the mind involuntarily muses upon the things wherewith it performs the virtues. From these things [*last mentioned*] the mind, in a wholesome manner, receives the cause of fervor and the gathering of its deliberations, for because of its lack of training the mind, with a good intention, prefers to labor in a corporeal manner, though it does not do so passionately. Observe also whether your mind remains unaffected by hidden confrontations with the imprints of thoughts because of a mightier ardor for the Divine, which is wont to cut off vain recollections.

These few indications we have provided in this chapter will suffice a man for his enlightenment instead of many books, if he lives quietly and has discernment. Fear for the body is often so strong in a man as to make him incapable of any deeds worthy of honor or praise. But when fear for the soul overshadows bodily fear, then bodily fear succumbs before it like wax from the heat of a flame. But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 3

That without toil the soul enters into understanding of the wisdom of God and of His creatures, if she becomes still to the world and the cares of life; for then she can come to know her nature and what treasures she has hidden within herself

WHEN THE CARES OF LIFE do not enter into the soul from without, and she abides in her nature, then she does not require prolonged toil to penetrate into and understand the wisdom of God. For her separation from the world and her stillness naturally move her toward the understanding of God's creatures. And by this she is lifted up toward God; being astonished, she is struck with wonder, and she remains with God. When water does not seep into the fountain of the soul from without, the natural water that springs up in her incessantly bubbles up with thoughts of God's wonders; but when the soul is found without these things, it is either because she has received a cause for this from some alien recollection, or because the senses have stirred up turmoil against her by means of encounters with external things.

When the senses, however, are confined by stillness and not permitted to venture forth, and by its aid the soul's memories grow old, then you will see what are the soul's natural thoughts, what is the nature of the soul, and what treasures she has hidden within herself. These treasures are the perception of things incorporeal which of itself is inspired in the soul, without the exercise of forethought and toil for its sake. For a man does not even know that such thoughts could arise in human nature. For who taught him these things? Or how did he comprehend that which, even when understood, is impossible to make plain to others? Or who was his guide to that which he had never learned from another?

Such then is the nature of the soul. The passions are, consequently, an addition [*to nature*] from causes in the soul. Yet by nature the soul is passionless. Whenever you hear in the Scriptures of passions of the

soul and body, know that this is said in reference to the causes of the passions. For the soul is naturally dispassionate. Those who prefer outward philosophy do not accept this, and neither do their adherents. But we believe that God created His image passionless – yet I do not mean *His image* in reference to the body, but to the soul, which is invisible; for every image is taken from a prototype. And it is impossible for a visible image to depict the likeness of something invisible. So you must believe that the passions, as we said earlier, do not belong to the soul [*by nature*]. But if anyone wishes to challenge what has been said, we shall ask:

Question What is the nature of the soul? Is it, then, something passionless and filled with light, or something passionate and dark?

Answer If the nature of the soul was once translucent and pure by the reception of that blessed light, it will be found the same when it returns to its original state. Therefore, when the soul is moved in a passionate way, she is confessedly outside her nature, as the children of the Church maintain. The passions, therefore, entered into the soul afterwards, and it is not right to say that the passions belong to the soul, even though she is moved by them. Hence it is evident that she is moved by things from without, not by what is her own. If passions are said to be natural because by them the soul is moved through the intermediary of the body, then hunger, thirst, and sleep would also be natural [*to the soul*], because she suffers in these things and groans together with the body: in the amputation of its members, in fevers, in diseases, and so forth. For because of her communion with the body, the soul suffers pain together with it, just as the body with the soul; and the soul is moved to gladness by the body's gladness and she bears its afflictions.

*On the soul, the passions, and the purity of the mind in questions and answers**

Question What is the natural state of the soul, what is the state contrary to nature, and what is the state above nature?

[18] *Answer* The natural state of the soul is understanding of God's creatures, both sensory and noetic. The supernatural state of the soul is her movement in the divine vision of the supersubstantial Deity. The contranatural state of the soul is her being moved by the pas-

* This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily.

sions. And this is exactly what the divine and great Basil has said: 'When the soul is found in accord with her nature, her life is on high; when she is found outside her nature, she is below upon the earth. When she is on high, she is free from the passions; but as soon as her nature descends from its own state, the passions are found in her.'

It is evident, therefore, that the so-called passions of the soul are not the soul's by nature. If this be so, then the soul is moved by the body's blameworthy passions even as she is by hunger and thirst. But since no law has been imposed on her in regard to the latter, the soul is not to be blamed, as she is in regard to the former passions which are subject to reproach. There are times when God permits a man to do something apparently improper and he receives, instead of blame and censure, a good recompense: as Hosea the prophet, who married a harlot; as the prophet Elias, who put men to death in his zeal for God; and as those who slew their kindred by the sword at Moses' command. It is said, nevertheless, that desire and anger naturally belong to the soul apart from what pertains to the nature of the body, and that these are her passions.

Hos. 1:2
3 Kgs. 18:40
Exod. 32:27

Question We ask: is the soul's desire natural when it is set on fire by divine things, or by the things of earth and the flesh? And is anger natural when it is said that by anger the soul's nature is excited to zeal on account of bodily desire, envy, vainglory, and the rest, or when it is on account of things opposed to these? Let the disputer reply to us on these points, and we shall follow up.

Answer Divine Scripture says many things with a special intent and often uses names figuratively, as for instance: things that pertain to the body are said of the soul, and things pertaining to the soul are said of the body, making no distinction between them. The sagacious, however, understand what they read, that is, the intent of Scripture. Likewise things pertaining to the Lord's Divinity (which are not compatible with human nature) are said with respect to His all-holy body; and again, lowly things are said concerning His Divinity which pertain to His humanity. Many, not understanding the intent of the divine words, have stumbled here with a stumbling from which there is no recovery. So too it is with names pertaining to the body and the soul.

If, therefore, virtue is the natural health of the soul, then the passions are an illness of the soul which befalls and invades her nature

and despoils her proper health. Now it is obvious that in every nature health is antecedent to any disease which might befall it. And if this
[19] be so, as indeed it is, then by necessity virtue is in the soul naturally, but that which is an accident[1] is external to her nature. For it is impossible that something which is prior should not be natural.

Question Do the bodily passions belong to the soul by nature, or by accident? And are the passions of the soul, which she possesses by reason of her connection with the body, said to be hers by nature, or as a figure of speech?

Answer No one dares to say that the passions belong to the body only figuratively; but as for those of the soul, one must be bold and say, inasmuch as it is recognized and confessed by all that purity is a natural property of the soul, that the passions in no wise belong to the soul by nature. For sickness is posterior to health, and it is impossible that one and the same nature be both good and evil. Therefore of necessity, one must precede the other; and the one which is prior is also the natural, because anything which is accidental is not said to belong to a nature, but to intrude from without. And change follows upon every accident and intrusion. Nature, however, does not change or alter itself.

Every passion that exists for our benefit has been given by God. The passions of the body have been implanted in it for its benefit and growth, and the same is true with respect to the passions of the soul. But whenever the body is forced by a privation of what is proper to it to be outside of its own well-being and to follow after the soul, it is enfeebled and harmed. And whenever the soul, abandoning what belongs to her, follows after the body, she is immediately harmed, as the divine Apostle said: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit
Gal. 5:17 against the flesh, and these two are contrary the one to the other.' Let no one, therefore, blaspheme God, saying that He has imposed the passions and sin upon our nature. For He has implanted in natures that which causes each to grow. But whenever one nature enters into agreement with another, it is no longer found in what is proper to it, but in that which is opposed to it. For if the passions were in the soul naturally, for what reason is she harmed by them? For that which is proper to a nature does not destroy it.

1. Or *a chance occurrence, a contingency.*

Question Why does the fulfilling of the bodily passions strengthen and make the body grow, while those of the soul harm the soul, if they are proper to her? And for what reason does virtue torment the body but enrich the soul?

Answer Do you not see how things that are external to a nature harm it? For every nature is filled with gladness when it draws near to what is proper to it. And do you wish to know what is proper to each nature? Observe, that which aids nature is proper to it; but that which is harmful is alien and invades it from without. Therefore, since it is known that the passions of the soul and body oppose one another, it is evident that although the soul should employ something [20] that helps and relieves the body, this thing should not be thought to belong to the soul's nature. For what is proper to the soul's nature is death to the body. But by a figure of speech it is nevertheless attributed to the soul, and because of the body's frailty she cannot be liberated from these things so long as she is clad with the flesh. For through God's inscrutable wisdom, by nature the soul has been made a sharer in the body's griefs, by reason of the union of her movement with the body's movement. But although they are thus partakers of one another, still the movement of one is separate from the movement of the other, the will of one from the will of the other, the body from the spirit.

Nature remains totally unconfused and it does not suppress its properties. Every nature,[2] though a man forcibly brings it into agreement with either sin or virtue, will exert its own will and breed its own offspring. When the soul is raised from bodily cares, then by the action of the Spirit she, in her entirety, stimulates her movements to blossom forth, and in the bosom of Heaven she swims amidst incomprehensible things. But even when this occurs, the body is permitted to retain a consciousness of what is proper to it. Likewise, if the body is found in sin, the soul's own deliberations do not cease to spring up in the understanding.

Question What is the purity of the mind?

Answer The man who is pure in mind is not he who has no knowledge of evil (for that is to be like a brute beast), nor he who is by na-

2. Specifically, that of the soul and body. The Greek MSS have various readings here.

ture on the level of infants,[3] nor again he who never takes up human affairs, nor yet is purity of mind that we should not beseech men for any created thing. But purity of the mind is this: to be rapt in things divine, and this comes about after a man has practised the virtues. We are not so bold as to say that anyone has achieved this without experience of evil thoughts, for in such a case he would not be clad with a body. For until death we cannot dare to say that our nature is not warred upon or harmed. And by experience of evil thoughts, I do not mean to submit to them, but to make a beginning to struggle with them.

The movement of thoughts in a man originates from four causes. Firstly, from the natural will of the flesh; secondly, from the imagination of the world's sensory objects which a man hears and sees; thirdly, from mental predispositions and from the aberration of the soul; and fourthly, from the assaults of the demons who wage war with us in all the passions through the causes which we have already mentioned. For this reason, till death a man cannot be without thoughts
[21] and warfare so long as he is in the life of the flesh.[4] If, before the destruction of this world or before a man's death, one of these four causes could possibly be done away with, or whether it be possible for the body not to seek its needs and not to be compelled to desire any of the world's goods, judge for yourself.

But if it is absurd to suppose any such thing, since our nature is in need of the world's goods, then it follows that the passions move in the man who is clad with a body, whether he wills it or not. Wherefore every man must guard himself. By the word *passion* I do not speak of one [*sort*] only – which openly and continually moves within a man – or of two, but of many kinds, since he is clad with a body. Although those who have vanquished the passions by means of the

3. I.e. a half-wit.

4. From the beginning of the paragraph until this point the Syriac reads *Struggle with the thoughts is aroused in the mind by four general causes which form a basis for the movement of all the different passions. Hence, in this life, a man cannot be freed from recollections of this world, and though he be a front-line fighter, or even like Paul, he cannot be considered perfect. Still, although he experiences the vexation of the passions through these four causes – namely, the body, through its naturally ordered movements; the world, through its objects with the mediation of the senses; the soul, through thoughts, recollections, and the forces of aberration; and the demons, through the activities of the aforesaid – yet even so, when he is troubled by them but briefly, he will be caught away to more excellent things which he perceives by his understanding.*

virtues are vexed by thoughts and the assaults of these four causes, yet they are not overcome, because they have power and their mind is caught away into good and divine recollections.[5]

Question In what respect does purity of mind differ from purity of heart?

Answer Purity of mind is one thing, and purity of heart is another, just as a limb differs from the whole body. Now the mind is one of the senses of the soul, but the heart is what contains and holds the inner senses: it is the sense of senses, that is, their root; but if the root is holy, then the branches are holy. It is evident, therefore, that if the heart is purified, all the senses are made pure. Now if the mind, on the one hand, is a little diligent in reading the divine Scriptures and toils a little in fasting, vigil, and stillness, it will forget its former activity and will become pure, as long as it abstains from alien concerns. Even so its purity will not be permanent, for just as it is quickly cleansed, so too it is quickly soiled.

But the heart, on the other hand, is only made pure by many afflictions, deprivations, separation from all fellowship with the world, and deadness to all things. Once it is purified, however, its purity is not soiled by little things, nor is it dismayed by great and open conflicts (I mean dreadful ones), inasmuch as it has acquired, as it were, a strong stomach capable of quickly digesting all the food that is indigestible to those who are weak. For so it is said among the physicians, that all meat is difficult to digest, but it produces great strength in healthy bodies when a strong stomach takes it.

Even so, any purity that comes quickly, with little time and slight labor, is also quickly lost and defiled. But the purity that comes [22] through many afflictions and is acquired over a long period of time in the soul's superior part is not endangered by any moderate assault.

*On the senses, and on temptations also**

When the senses are chaste and collected, they give birth to peace in the soul and do not allow her to experience strife; and whenever the soul has no perception of external things, victory will be gained

5. Compare this sentence with the end of note 4. Instead of this the Syriac reads *But if a man should grow presumptuous because of the weakness of his thoughts and the fewness of his severe conflicts, we say that whoever it might be, men are not in need of labors but of great watchfulness.*

* This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily.

without struggle. But if the soul should grow negligent in this matter, she will not be able to remain secure; and after a perception has entered, she must fight hard to expel it from herself. However, her first state of limpid purity[6] and natural innocence are lost. The majority of men, if not all the world, for this reason depart from the natural state and that limpid purity which is prior to the knowledge of diverse things. On this account, the more men are involved with the world, the more it is difficult for them to regain limpid purity, by reason of their knowledge of many evil things. Only one man among many can once again return to his primordial state by another means. But simplicity is far better than the diverse ways of [*obtaining*] forgiveness.

Fear is necessary for human nature in order that it might keep within the bounds of obedience to God. But the love of God incites a man to desire the works of virtue, and through love he is caught away to the doing of good. Spiritual knowledge naturally comes after the performance of the virtues, but both are preceded by fear and love; and again, fear precedes love. Whoever says with presumption that it is possible to acquire the more perfect virtues before he accomplishes the elementary has, without a doubt, laid the first foundation for the ruin of his soul. For the Lord's way is that the more perfect be born of the former virtues.

Do not exchange your brother's love for the love of any fleeting
[23] thing, because love conceals within itself Him Who is more precious than all things.[7] Abandon what is small, that you may find what is great. Spurn what is superfluous and without value, that you may discover what is truly valuable. Become as one dead during your life and you will not live unto death. Give yourself over to death in your

6. Gk. *καθαρότης*. This is the translation of the Syriac term *shapyutha*, which means *clearness, limpidity, transparency, serenity*. A clear sky is also serene. Some say that this term is equivalent to the Greek *ἀπάθεια, dispassion*. For St. Isaac, the soul's primordial state is one of *limpid purity*, and resembles Adam's state before he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Worldly knowledge and passions cause a man to lose the limpidity that is both natural and proper to his soul. Later East Syrian ascetical writers used the term *shapyutha* in a more technical sense, referring to a stage in spiritual life.

7. The Syriac continues with the following passage: That which a material object is to the eyes of the flesh, the same is passionate behavior to the hidden faculty of sight. And that which the murky passions are to the second mode of natural *theoria*, the same the passions are to the natural, settled state; and they are thus related to one another throughout the range of the diverse *theorias*. When the mind is fixed in the natural, settled state, it abides in angelic *theoria*, that is, primary and natural *theoria*, which is also called *naked mind*. But when the mind is in the second, natural knowledge, it suckles and

struggles, rather than live in heedlessness. For martyrs are not only those who have accepted death for their belief in Christ, but also those who die for the sake of keeping His commandments.

Do not become foolish in your petitions, lest you insult God by your ignorance. Become wise in your prayers, that you may be accounted worthy of glorious things. Seek what is honorable from Him Who gives ungrudgingly, that you may also receive honor from Him by reason of your wise volition. Solomon asked for wisdom and with it he received an earthly kingdom, inasmuch as he asked wisely of the Great King Himself. Elisseus asked for a double portion of the grace of the Spirit that abode in his teacher, and by no means failed of his request. For he that requests contemptible things of a king brings contempt upon the latter's honor. Israel asked for what was contemptible and received the wrath of God. It ceased to marvel at the works of God, His terrible wonders, and made supplication for its belly's lusts: 'But while their food was yet in their mouth, the wrath of God rose up against them.'

3 Kgs. 3:9 ff.; Wisd. 7:7 ff.

4 Kgs. 2:9

Ps. 77:33

Present your petitions to God so as to accord with His glory, that your honor may be magnified before Him, and He rejoice over you. For if a man should beseech the king for a measure of dung, he not only dishonors himself by his miserable petition (since he has shown great lack of sense), but also he has heaped insult upon the king because of what he asked for – even so he that seeks earthly things from God in his prayers does the same. For lo, angels and archangels, who are the King's great officials, are gazing steadfastly upon you at the time of your prayer to see what petition you will make of their Master; and they are astonished and exultant whenever they behold one who is made of earth forsake his dunghill and ask for what is heavenly.

Do not ask of God a thing that He Himself, without our asking, has already taken forethought to give not only to us, those of His own household and His beloved friends, but also to those who are [24]

is sustained by milk from breasts, as it were. This is called the *outward garment* of the degree just mentioned [*i.e. the naked mind*]. It is placed after purity, which the mind enters first. It is also prior in existence, for it is the first degree of knowledge, although it is last in honor. For this reason it is also called secondary, and is like certain inscribed letters whereby the mind is trained and cleansed for the ascent to the second degree, which is perfection of the motions of the understanding and the degree that is nigh to divine *theoria*. The outward garment of the mind is the senses, but its nakedness is its being moved by immaterial divine visions.

strangers to the knowledge of Him. 'Be not like unto the heathen,' He
Matt. 6:7 says, 'who use vain repetitions in their prayers.' 'For after all these
Matt. 6:32 bodily things do the heathen seek,' says the Lord. 'But ye, take no
Matt. 6:31 thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put
Matt. 6:32 on. For your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' A son does not ask bread of his father, but seeks the great and lofty things of his father's house. It was on account of the feebleness of the minds of men that the Lord commanded us to ask for our daily bread, for see what He commanded those who are perfect in knowledge and
Matt. 6:28 healthy of soul: 'Take no thought concerning food or raiment,' He says, 'for if He taketh care for the brute beasts, and the birds, and
Matt. 6:26 even lifeless things, will He not take much more care for you? But seek ye rather the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all
Matt. 6:33 these things shall be added unto you.'

If you should beseech God for a thing and He forbears to hearken to you speedily, do not grieve, for you are not wiser than God. This happens to you either because you are not worthy to obtain your request, or because the pathways of your heart do not accord with your petitions (but rather the contrary), or because you have not yet reached the measure wherein you could receive the gift you ask for. We must not rush onwards to great measures before the time,[8] lest God's gift be debased by our hasty reception of it. For anything that is quickly obtained is also easily lost, whereas everything found with toil is also kept with careful watching.

Thirst for Jesus, that He may make you drunk with His love. Close your eyes to the delights of this life, that God may deem you worthy to have His peace reigning in your heart. Abstain from what your eyes behold, that you may be accounted worthy of spiritual joy. If your works are displeasing to God, seek not from Him glorious things, lest you become a man who tempts God. As your manner of life, so must your prayer be. For it is impossible for someone bound up in earthly matters to seek what is heavenly, and the man who is occupied with worldly affairs cannot ask for what is divine. Each man's desire is revealed by his works, and in whatever matters he shows his zeal, it is for those that he strives in prayer. The man who desires the greatest things does not concern himself with the lesser.

Be free, though you are bound in a body, and for Christ's sake

8. Syriac *It is not right that great things should fall quickly into our hands.*

show forth obedience in your freedom. But also be prudent in your simplicity, lest you be plundered. Love humility in all your activities, that you be delivered from the imperceptible snares that are always [25] found outside the pathways of humble men. Do not reject afflictions, for through them you will enter into the knowledge of the truth; and do not fear temptations, because therein you find precious things. Pray that you enter not into the temptations of the soul, but with all your strength prepare yourself for those of the body. Without these you cannot draw nigh to God, because divine rest is laid up within them. He that flees temptations flees from virtue. But by *temptation* I mean not that which originates from lusts, but from afflictions.

Question How does 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation' agree Matt. 26:41 with 'Strive to enter in at the narrow gate'? And again, with 'Fear not Luke 13:24 them that kill the body,' and 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall Matt. 10:28 find it'? Why is it that the Lord everywhere urges us on to temptations, yet here He enjoins us to pray not to enter into them? Indeed, Matt. 10:39 what virtue is without affliction and trial? Or what kind of trial is greater than for a man to lose his very self, a trial into which He has bidden us all to enter on His account? For He says, 'He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me.' How is it, Matt. 10:38 therefore, that in all His teaching He has enjoined us to enter into temptations, yet here He has commanded us to pray not to enter into them? 'Ye must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of Acts 14:22 God,' says Paul. And again, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' John 16:33 and 'In your patience' regarding these things 'ye shall gain your souls.' Luke 21:19

O the subtlety of the path of Thy teachings, O Lord! Outside this path is the man who reads without understanding and knowledge. When the sons of Zebedee and their mother aspired to sit at Thy side in Thy Kingdom, Thou didst say unto them, 'Are ye able to drink the cup' of temptations 'that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' And how is it that here, O Master, Matt. 20:22 Thou dost permit us to pray not to enter into temptation? Concerning what sort of temptations dost Thou command us to pray that we enter not into them?

Answer Pray, He says, that you enter not into temptations of your faith. Pray that through your mind's self-esteem you enter not into temptation with the demon of blasphemy and pride. Pray that you

enter not by God's permission into the manifest temptation of the devil because of the evil thoughts which you have entertained in your mind and on account of which you suffer temptation.[9] Pray that the
[26] angel[10] of your chastity may not withdraw from you, that you be not warred upon by the fiery war of sin, and be separated from him. Pray that you enter not into a temptation of vexation with someone. Pray that you enter not into temptations of soul through doubts and provocations by which the soul is violently drawn into great conflict.

Howbeit, prepare yourself with all your soul to receive bodily temptations; voyage in them with all your members and fill your eyes with tears, so that the angel who guards you does not depart from you. For without trials God's providence is not seen, and you cannot obtain boldness before God, nor learn the wisdom of the Spirit, nor can divine longing be established in you. Before temptations a man prays to God as though he were a stranger; but when he enters into temptations for the sake of His love and does not permit himself to be deflected, then straightway he has, as it were, God as his debtor, and God reckons him as a true friend, since he has warred against His enemy and defeated him for the sake of His will. This is to 'pray that you enter not into temptation.' And again, pray that you enter not into the fearsome temptation of the devil by reason of your arrogance, but because you love God, and you wish that His power might help you and through you vanquish His enemies. Pray that you enter not into such trials because of the wickedness[11] of your thoughts and works, but rather in order that your love of God may be tested, and that His strength be glorified in your patience.

On our Master's tender compassion, whereby from the height of His majesty He has condescended to men's weakness; and on temptations *

But on the other hand, if you pay attention with understanding, our Lord did enjoin us to pray concerning bodily trials also, making provision for us after the manner of His loving-kindness and accord-

9. Syriac *the manifest temptations of the senses, which the devil knows how to bring upon you when God permits it because of the foolish thoughts you entertain.*

10. Syriac *witness.* 11. Syriac *folly.*

* This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily.

ing to the measure of His grace. For knowing our nature to be frail because of the earthy and unsound substance of our body, and that it[12] cannot withstand temptations when engulfed by them, and that for this reason we fall away from the truth and we turn our backs, being overcome by afflictions, He therefore commanded us to pray that we should not suddenly fall into temptations, if it be possible to please God without them.

If, however, we should fall suddenly into terrible trials by reason of our quest for great virtue, and if virtue cannot be accomplished at that time if we do not endure them, then, in such a case, we should spare neither ourselves nor other men. Nor out of fear must we relinquish the noble and honorable deed in which the life of the soul is treasured up, and employ as a veil for our laxity the words, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' It is said concerning such persons that 'through the commandment they sin in secret.' If, therefore, it befalls a man that temptation comes upon him and compels him to break one of Christ's commandments, that is, to abandon his chastity, or the monastic life, or to deny the Faith, or not to struggle for Christ's sake,[13] or to set at naught any one of the commandments, and he becomes afraid and does not courageously resist these temptations, then he will fall away from the truth. [27]

So let us shun the body with all our strength, surrender our souls to God, and in the Lord's Name enter into the arena of temptations. May He that preserved Joseph in the land of Egypt and showed him forth as an icon and exemplar of chastity, Who kept Daniel unharmed in the lions' den and the Three Children in the fiery furnace, Who delivered Jeremias from the pit of mire and bestowed mercy upon him in the midst of the camp of the Chaldeans, Who brought Peter out of prison while the doors were shut and saved Paul from the synagogue of the Jews and, to speak simply, He that always continues with His servants in every place and country, Who manifests His power and victory in them, Who preserves them with manifold wonders and reveals His salvation to them in all their afflictions, may He give us strength also, and rescue us from amid the waves that encompass us. Amen.

Gen. 39:1 ff.
Dan. 6:16 ff.
Dan. 3:20 ff.
Jer. 45 (38):6
Jer. 47 (40):1
Acts 12:7 ff.
Acts 21:30 ff.

12. I.e. our nature.

13. Syriac *not to bear witness to the Word of God.*

Let us, therefore, acquire zeal in our souls against the devil and his ministers, even such as the Maccabees had, and the holy prophets, apostles, martyrs, the righteous, and the just. For these men proved allies of the divine laws and the commandments of the Spirit in fearful places and amid most grievous tribulations. Mightily did they put the world and the flesh behind their backs and persevere in their righteousness; and they were not overcome by the perils that encircled both their soul and body, but courageously they took the victory, and their names are written in the book of life until the coming of Christ. By God's decree their teaching has been preserved for our in-
Rom. 15:4 struction and strengthening, as the blessed Apostle testifies, that we might become wise and learn the ways of God, and keep their histo-
[28] ries and lives in view as living and breathing icons, and take our example from them, and run their course, and make ourselves like unto them. The words of God are as sweet to the soul possessed of great understanding, as food that delights the body; and the histories of the righteous are as desirable to the ears of the meek, as continual watering to a newly planted tree.

Therefore, beloved, have in your mind God's providence (which from the beginning until now is dispensed with foreknowledge) as some excellent medicine for weakened eyes, and keep its recollection with you at all times. Ponder, consider, and be taught by these things, that you may learn to hold the remembrance of the greatness of God's honor in your soul, and thus find life eternal for your soul in Jesus Christ our Lord, Who is become 'the Mediator between God
1 Tim. 2:5 and men' as being the Uniter in His two natures.[14] The orders of the angels cannot approach the glory that surrounds the throne of His majesty, yet He has appeared in the world for our sake in a mean and humble form, as Esaias said: 'We beheld Him, that He had no form
Isa. 53:2 nor beauty.' It is He that, being invisible to all created nature, put on a body and fulfilled the economy for the salvation and life of all the nations which were cleansed by Him, to Whom be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

14. Or *Uniter by His two natures* or *united in His two natures*, i.e. reading a passive participle instead of an active one (in Syriac the forms are identical). The Greek reads here *united out of both*, while the Vat. Syr. MS 124 *united out of the two*, i.e. natures, an evident interpolation.

Homily 4

On the love of God and renunciation and the rest which is in God

THE SOUL THAT LOVES GOD finds rest only in God. First loose yourself from all external bonds and then you will be able to bind your heart to God, because the being bound to God is preceded by the being loosed from matter. After an infant is weaned, it is given bread to eat; and the man who wishes to progress in things divine must first be weaned from the world, like an infant from its mother's breasts. Works performed with the body precede those performed with the soul, just as in generation the creation of the body preceded the creation of the soul.[1] The man who has not performed bodily works cannot possess the works of the soul, since the second are born of the first like the ear of corn from a naked grain of wheat; and he who does not possess the works of the soul is bereft of spiritual gifts.

The sufferings of the present age undertaken for the truth cannot be compared with the delight that is prepared for those who labor in good works. And just as the sheaves of gladness follow for those who sow with tears, so joy follows for those who suffer hardship for the sake of God. Bread procured with much sweat seems sweet to the husbandman, and sweet are works for righteousness' sake to the heart which has received the knowledge of Christ. Suffer contempt and humiliation with good will, that you may have boldness before God. The man who with knowledge endures all manner of harsh words without having previously wronged his chider, at that moment places a crown of thorns on his head, and he is blessed, for he is crowned with an imperishable crown in a time that he knows not.

Rom. 8:18

Ps. 125:6

The man who flees futile glory with knowledge has already sensed

1. *Vide* Gen. 2:7. This is the reading of the Syriac printed text. Here the Origenists are refuted. The Vat. Syr. MS reads *as in the case of the soul's inbreathing.* The Greek has *as dust did the soul's inbreathing in Adam.*

in his soul the hope of the age to come. The monk who says he has left the world and strives with men because of some necessity, lest he should be deprived of his ease, is utterly blind, since although he has voluntarily abandoned the whole body,[2] yet he contends for one of its members. The mind of the man who flees the ease of this age has scrutinized the age to come. He who is bound by possessions is a slave of the passions. Do not imagine that merely the possession of gold and silver is possessiveness; rather, it is the acquisition of anything whatever which your will clings to.

Do not extol the man who endures bodily hardship and yet gives free rein to his senses: I mean, that of hearing, and whose mouth is gaping and intemperate, and eyes roaming. If you make it a rule for your soul to practise [*deeds of*] mercy, accustom your soul not to seek your justification in other works, lest you find yourself scattering with one hand what you have gathered with the other; for solicitude is necessary in the first instance, whereas breadth of heart in the second. Be it known to you, that to remit our debtors their sins is one of the works of righteousness; then you will see tranquillity and luster throughout your entire mind. When you rise above the path of justice, you will cleave to freedom in all your actions.

One of the saints spoke of this, saying: 'The merciful man, if he be not just, is blind.'[3] That is to say, he must give to another man what he has gained by his own labors and hardship and not what he has through fraud, injustice, and trickery. And the same saint said in another place: 'If you wish to sow your seed among the destitute, sow from your own seed; for if you wish to sow from other men's seed, know that what you sow is the most bitter of tares.'[3] But I say, that if the merciful man does not rise above what is just, he is not merciful. That is to say, he is merciful who not only shows mercy to others by giving from his own means, but who also suffers injustice from other men with joy voluntarily, and not merely keeps and requires justice in his dealings with his fellow men but also shows them mercy. When a man overcomes justice by mercy, he is crowned, though not with crowns awarded under the Law to the righteous, but with the crowns of the perfect who are under the Gospel. For, the ancient Law also dictates that a man must give to the poor from his own means, and

2. Syriac *world*.

3. Abba Nilus of Sinai (*PG* 79.1244C).

clothe the naked, and love his neighbor as himself, and forbids injustice and lying. But the perfection of the Gospel's dispensation commands the following: 'Give to every man that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.' And further, a Luke 6:30
man must not merely with joy suffer injustice as regards his possessions and the rest of the external things which come upon him, but he must also lay down his life for his brother. This is the merciful man, and not he that simply shows mercy to his brother by giving him [31]
something. And whoever burns within his heart when he sees or hears of something that grieves his brother, such a one is truly merciful, as is also the man who being slapped by his brother does not act shamelessly and answer abusively, thus grieving his brother's heart.

Honor the work of vigil, that consolation may come near your soul.

Persevere in reading while dwelling in stillness, that your mind may be drawn toward the wonders of God at all times.

Love poverty with patience, that your mind may be collected and secured from wandering.

Detest superfluity, that you may preserve your thoughts untroubled.

Withdraw yourself from multitudinous affairs and have your soul as your only concern, so that you may save her innermost tranquillity from dispersion.

Love chastity, that you may not be disgraced in the time of your prayer to Christ the Judge of the contest.

Acquire purity in your actions, that your soul may glisten with joy during prayer, and that at the remembrance of death rejoicing may be kindled in your mind.

Be on your guard against small things, lest you fall in great matters. Be not slothful in your work, lest you be disgraced when you stand in the midst of your companions; and do not be found without provisions for your journey, lest you be left alone by the wayside.

Conduct your works with knowledge, lest you abandon your entire course.

Acquire freedom in your manner of life, that you may be freed of turmoil. Do not bind your freedom by what affords you pleasure, lest you become a slave of slaves. Love mean apparel as your dress so that

you may set at naught the thoughts which spring up in you, I mean, haughtiness of heart and licentiousness. For the man who loves splendid apparel cannot acquire humble thoughts, since necessarily the heart within conforms to the attire without.

Who is the man that can acquire a pure mind while loving idle chatter? And who can acquire lowly thoughts while seeking to capture glory from men? Or, who can become pure of thought and humble of heart when he is licentious and dissolute in his members? For whenever the mind is drawn away by the senses, it also eats the food of beasts with them. But when the senses are drawn by the mind, they partake together with it of the sustenance of angels.

Vainglory is a servant of fornication; but when it is found in monastic discipline, it is a servant of pride. Self-constraint follows humility, but spacious living is united to love of glory. Humility attains to divine vision because of her continual self-constriction, and she adorns the soul with chastity. But vainglory, through its continual turmoil and confusion caused by thoughts which arise from encounters with things, gathers abominable treasures for itself and defiles the heart. And again, vainglory beholds the natures of things with a licentious vision and occupies the mind with deplorable imaginings;
[32] but humility spiritually constricts herself by means of divine vision and moves the man who possesses her to glorify God.

Do not compare those who work signs and wonders and mighty acts in the world with those who practise stillness with knowledge. Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world's starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. It is better for you to free yourself from the shackle of sin than to free slaves from their slavery. It is better for you to make peace with your soul, causing concord to reign over the trinity within you (I mean, the body, the soul, and the spirit), than by your teaching to bring peace among men at variance. For, as Gregory the Theologian says, 'It is a good thing to speak concerning the things of God for God's sake, but it is better for a man to make himself pure for God.'[4] Love uncouthness of speech joined with knowledge from inner experience more than to gush forth rivers of instruction from the keenness of your intellect and from a deposit of hearsay and writings of ink. It is

4. Oration 3, *On Flight*, §12.

more profitable for you to attend to raising up unto the activity of your cogitations concerning God the deadness of your soul due to the passions, than it is to resurrect the dead.

Many have accomplished mighty acts, raised the dead, toiled for the conversion of the erring, and have wrought great wonders; and by their hands they have led many to the knowledge of God. Yet after these things, these same men who quickened others, fell into vile and abominable passions and slew themselves, becoming a stumbling-block for many when their acts were made manifest. For they were still sickly in soul, but instead of caring for their souls' health, they committed themselves to the sea of this world in order to heal the souls of others, being yet in ill health; and, in the manner I have stated, they lost their souls and fell away from their hope in God. The infirmity of their senses was not able to confront or resist the flame of things that customarily make wild the vehemence of the passions. For their senses still required guarding: I mean, that these men should not have seen women at all, or have taken their ease, or gained wealth and possessions, or had authority over others, or been exalted above other men.

It is better for you if men think you unlearned and uncouth because of your inexperience in disputation, rather than one of the wise because of your shamelessness. Become poor for humility's sake, and do not amass riches on account of your shamelessness. Confute those who would strive to dispute with you by the strength of your virtues, and not by the persuasiveness of your words. By the meekness and quietness of your lips, put the impudence of the obstinate to silence, and not by speaking. Reprove the wanton by the nobility of your life, [33] and those who are shameless as regards the senses, by the modest curbing of your eyes.

Consider yourself a stranger all the days of your life, wherever you may be, so that you may find deliverance from the injury which is born of familiarity. In every matter consider yourself to be totally ignorant so as to escape the reproach which follows the suspicion that you wish to set aright other men's opinions. Let your lips always utter blessings, and you will never be reviled; for revilement begets revilement, and blessing begets blessing. In all things think that you are in need of teaching, and you will prove wise throughout your life. Do

not pass on to another what you yourself have not attained, lest you put yourself to shame and your lie be exposed by a comparison with your life. If you begin to say something profitable, say it as though you yourself are still learning, and not with authority and shamelessness. Judge yourself beforehand and prove to your listeners that you are inferior to them in order to show them the way of humility, and to incite them to hearken to your words and readily to take action; then you shall be venerable in their eyes. And if possible, speak of these matters with tears so that both you and they may be profited and the grace of God may be with you.

If you gain the grace of God and are deemed worthy to revel in the divine vision of God's judgments and of visible creation, which is the first summit[5] of knowledge, prepare yourself, yea, arm yourself against the spirit of blasphemy. Do not take a stand in this battlefield without weapons, lest speedily you be slain by those who lie in wait for you and deceive you. And let your weapons be tears and continuous fasting with prostrations. Beware of reading the doctrines of heretics[6] for they, more than anything else, can arm the spirit of blasphemy against you. And when you fill your stomach, do not shamelessly search out matters and concepts concerning God, lest you later repent of it. Understand what I say: there can be no knowledge of the mysteries of God on a full stomach.

Read often and insatiably the books of the teachers of the Church on divine providence, for they lead the mind to discern the order in God's creatures and His actions, give it strength, and by their subtleness they prepare it to acquire luminous perceptions and guide it in purity toward the understanding of God's creatures. Read also the Gospels, which God ordained for knowledge for the whole world,
[34] that you may find provisions for your journey in the might of God's providence for every generation, and that your mind may plunge deeply into wonder at Him. Such reading furthers your aim. Let your reading be done in a stillness that nothing disturbs; be free of all concern for the body and the turmoil of affairs, so that through the sweet

5. Gk. *stage*. Here St. Isaac is not referring to the first degree of knowledge explained in Homily 52.

6. Syriac *Beware of reading books that delineate the doctrines of* [*other*] *creeds with a view to explaining them*.

understanding which surpasses all the senses you may savor that most sweet taste in your soul which she perceives in herself because of her constant intercourse with these things. Let not the words of experienced men be to you as those of shallow persons and the vendors of words, lest you dwell in darkness till your life's end and be deprived of any profit from them, and lest, like a man confused, you become troubled in the time of warfare and fall into a pit because of a thing that is seemingly good.

This shall be a sign for you, in whatever matter you wish to penetrate, if you have truly entered into that realm: when grace begins to open your eyes so that you may perceive the divine vision of things such as they are, then your eyes will immediately start to shed torrents of tears, so much so that they will wash your cheeks by their abundance. Thereupon peace comes to the war of the senses and it is curtailed within you. But if someone should teach you otherwise, do not believe him. Besides tears, you should not ask any other manifest sign from the body as an indication that you have perceived the truth, except the silence of the activity of the members; that is to say, when the mind is exalted above created things, the body also takes leave of tears and of every movement and sensation apart from its natural vitality. For this knowledge does not stoop to take with itself as a companion – figuratively, through mental vision – the forms of things of the visible world. 'Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth,' and he heard 'unspeakable words.' All that is heard by the ears can be spoken. He did not hear audible sounds, nor did he see a vision composed of the corporeal images of sense perception, but it was by the motions of the understanding, being in rapture, while his will had no fellowship with the body. Eye has never seen such things, nor ear heard the like, and his heart never imagined that the likeness which his diversified knowledge saw would rise up [*in it*] through recollection, I mean those things which God has prepared to show the pure of heart by reason of their deadness to the world. This is not corporeal vision received by means of the eyes of flesh through gross distinctions, nor phantasies which they[7] themselves form in their minds in an unreal manner. But this is the simplicity of *theoria* concerning noetic things and the things of

2 Cor. 12:2, 4

1 Cor. 2:9

7. I.e. the pure of heart.

faith (which is contrary to partition and divisions that exhibit images composed of elements). Gaze upon the sphere of the sun according to your visual power and only to delight in its rays, but not to investigate the course of its orb, lest you be deprived of your limited visual faculty as well.

[35] 'When you find honey, partake of it with measure, lest becoming
Prov. 25:16 satiated, you vomit it up.' The nature of the soul is light and imponderable. Hence, she sometimes leaps, desiring to ascend to great heights and learn things that surpass her nature; for often she grasps something from the reading of the Scriptures and the divine vision of created things. But when it is permitted, and she compares herself with those things she has grasped, she finds herself much inferior and meaner as regards the measure of her constitution. For her knowledge has entered into such things that she is clothed with fear and trembling in her thoughts, and she hastens under the constraint of timidity to return to her lowly life upon the earth, being ashamed, as it were, that she dared to approach spiritual matters which surpass her. Because of the fear which these things inspire, a certain timidity is born in her, and discretion beckons to the soul's mind to practise silence and refrain from shamelessness, lest she perish; and it bids her not to seek things which far surpass her, or search out what is more lofty than she. When you are given the power to understand – understand; do not act shamelessly with regard to mysteries, but worship, silently give glory, and confess what surpasses comprehension. Just
Prov. 25:27 as 'it is not good to eat much honey,' so it is also not a good thing to probe into glorious utterances, lest, desiring to behold things far distant when we have not yet attained to them – owing to the ruggedness of the way – our faculty of vision should grow feeble and be injured. For sometimes, indeed, phantasms are seen instead of the truth. And when the understanding grows weary from its searching, it loses its focus. Thus, the wise Solomon has said well that, 'A man
Prov. 25:28 without patience is like a city without walls.' There is no need for us to roam about heaven and earth in quest of God, or to send forth our minds into diverse places in search of Him. Therefore, purify your soul, O man, and drive away from you all cares which concern things outside your nature, and shroud your soul's perceptions and movements with the veil of chastity and humility: by this means you will

discover Him that is within you, since 'mysteries are revealed to the humble.' Ecclus. 3:19

If you intend to dedicate your soul to the work of prayer – which purifies the understanding – and to night vigil in order to acquire an illumined mind, betake yourself far from the sight of the world, sever all intercourse, and, even on seemingly good pretexts, do not allow friends to visit you in your cell, as is the custom, but only those who think and live as you do and are your fellow initiates. If you fear the confusion of hidden unspiritual converse which is wont to spring up in the soul involuntarily, cut off and loose yourself from outward converse. Yoke mercy to your prayer,[8] and your soul will see the light of truth. For in so far as the heart ceases to be disturbed by recollections of external things, to such an extent can the mind receive the astonishment that arises from understanding the meanings of the verses of Scripture. For it is an easy matter for the soul to exchange one converse for another, if we strive to show even a little diligence and patience. To exchange one converse for another, occupy yourself with reading books that will make plain to you the subtle pathways of ascetical discipline, of divine vision, and of the lives of the saints, although you may not sense the sweetness of this at once, owing to darkness caused by recollections of things close at hand. [36]

And when you stand up to pray and to say your rule of prayer, instead of thinking of what you have seen and heard in the world, you will find in your mind the divine Scriptures you have read, and this meditation will make you forget worldly things. In this manner your mind will come to purity. And herein lies the meaning of the following: 'Reading assists the soul when she stands in prayer'; and also: 'From reading the soul is enlightened in prayer.' Instead of confusion from without, reading provides [*the soul*] with material for the different kinds of prayer. This material is the truthful insights that suddenly enter the mind by reason of wondrous recollections of what was read. For how many times has the power of *theoria*, [*aroused*] by [*reading*] the Scriptures, astonished and stupefied the mind, even during prayer, and left it standing motionless! This power is also wont to cut off prayer itself by its sweetness, as I have said, to embrace the heart with stillness, and to silence the thoughts of the heart by arrest-

8. Syriac *the virtues to your prayers.*

ing the members of both body and soul. What I say is known by those who have experienced this very thing in their souls, who have entered into its mysteries, and have not learned of it from others or stolen it from writings which so often can falsify the truth. Thus, as was said, by reading the soul is enlightened anew and helped always to pray assiduously and without confusion.

It is just as shameful for lovers of the flesh and the belly to search out spiritual things as it is for a harlot to discourse on chastity. A body suffering grave illness shuns fatty foods and abhors them; and likewise, a mind occupied with worldly affairs cannot approach the inquiry into the things of God. A fire cannot be ignited in wet wood, nor can the divine fervor be kindled in a heart that loves ease. The harlot does not limit her affections to one man, nor does the soul that is pinioned by many concerns remain faithful to divine teachings. As a man who cannot see the sun because of the feebleness of his eyes is unable to describe to another its light, its rays and brilliance, since he himself has not beheld it but knows only from hearsay, so it is with the man whose soul has not tasted the sweetness of spiritual works
[37] and whose way of life has never brought him to the experience of these mysteries, so as to be able to grasp with his mind a likeness that embraces the truth. This man can never find real conviction in his soul or attain to the exact truth of things through human instruction and exercise in copying books.

If you have something above your daily needs, give it to the poor, and then go with boldness to offer your prayers, that is, to converse with God as a son with his Father. Nothing can bring the heart so near to God as almsgiving, and nothing brings such serenity to the mind as voluntary poverty. It is better for you to be called an ignoramus by the many because of the generosity of your hands and your measureless liberality because of your fear of God, than to be called wise and sound of mind by reason of your niggardliness. If someone on horseback should stretch out his hand and ask alms of you, do not refuse him, for at that moment he is certainly in need, just as one of the destitute. When you give, give generously, with a joyous countenance, and give more than you are asked for, since it is said: 'Send forth thy morsel of bread toward the face of the poor man, and soon
Eccles. 11:1 you will find your recompense.' Do not separate the rich from the

poor, nor try to discriminate the worthy from the unworthy, but let all men be equal in your eyes for a good deed. In this way you can draw even the unworthy toward the good, since the soul is easily led to the fear of God by means of bodily things. The Lord ate at table with publicans and harlots and did not alienate the unworthy, that He might in this way bring all to the fear of God, and that through bodily things they would approach the spiritual. For this reason, and especially because they are your brethren, of your very nature, and have erred from the truth unwittingly, deem every man equally worthy of benefaction and honor, be he a Jew, an unbeliever, or a murderer.

When you do good to someone, do not await a recompense from him, and you will receive repayment from God on both accounts; and if you are able, neither do good so as to receive reward in the future age, but rather, practise virtue because of the love of God. The rank of love is more initiated than the rank of labor for God, and it is more initiated in its mystery than the soul surpasses the body in initiation. If you make poverty a rule for your soul and, by God's grace, you are freed from cares, and by your poverty you are exalted above this world, then beware, lest you become enamored of possessions under the pretext of almsgiving due to your love for the poor, and thus, by taking from one man in order to give to another, you put your soul in turmoil once again, and efface your honor by subjection to men while begging from them, and lose the freedom and nobility of your mind through your concern for matters of this life. For your station is higher than that of the almsgiver. Do not, I beseech you, do not accept such subjection. Almsgiving is like the rearing of children, but [38]
stillness is the summit of perfection. If you have possessions, distribute them at once; but if you have none, do not desire any. Sweep your cell clean of every delicacy and superfluous article, and this will lead you to abstinence even against your will. Scarcity in all things teaches a man patience; but whenever we enjoy possessions, we are unable to control ourselves.

Those who have gained the victory in the exterior war have acquired confidence against interior fear and there is nothing that can vexedly compel them; they are not harassed by warfare, either from in front or from behind. By exterior warfare, I mean that which a

man heedlessly brings upon himself through the senses, that is, through giving out and receiving,[9] through hearing and seeing, and through speech, taking food, and a gradual, persistent increase of one's affairs. When such things overlie the soul, they blind her, and because of turmoil from without, she is unable to give heed to herself during the onslaught of hidden warfare and, because of her serenity, to conquer them that suddenly attack her from within. For when a man has barred the city gates, that is, the senses, he fights within face to face and does not fear those devising evil outside the city.

Blessed is the man who, knowing this and abiding in stillness, does not trouble himself with a multitude of works, but has translated all his physical activity into the work of prayer, and as he proceeds from divine service to divine service, does not join anything else to the work of God that consists in prayer and reading, being confident that inasmuch as he toils in company with God and has Him as his only concern both night and day, he will never be in want of any necessity. For it is on His account that he shuns distraction and works. But if a man cannot persevere in stillness without some manual pursuit, let him work, using this as an auxiliary, but not for gain's sake, satisfying greed. Such occupation is allocated for the weak, but it is a source of tribulation for the more perfect. The Fathers have declared that the needy and the slothful should work, but they did not make handwork compulsory.

At whatever time God should grant compunction to your heart from within, give yourself over to unremitting bows and prostrations, and when the demons try to persuade you to do something else, do not allow your heart to be concerned about any matter, and then behold, and wonder at what is born within you from this. There is nothing greater and more laborious in ascetical struggles, and nothing more excites envy in the demons, than if a man prostrates himself before the Cross of Christ, praying night and day, and is like a convict whose hands are bound behind him. Do you wish that your fervor should never be cooled, and your tears never impoverished?
[39] Govern yourself in this way, and you will be blessed, O man, making what has been told you your only care both night and day, and seeking nothing else. Then light will dawn within you, and your right-

9. I.e. by worldly dealings.

eousness will quickly shine forth, and you will be like a paradise of burgeoning flowers and an unfailing fountain of waters.

See what good things are born in a man from struggle! It often happens that when a man bends his knees in prayer and stretches forth his hands to the heavens, fixing his eyes upon the Cross of Christ and concentrating all his thoughts on God during his prayer, beseeching God all the while with tears and compunction, suddenly and without warning a fountain springs up in his heart gushing forth sweetness: his members grow feeble, his eyesight is veiled, he bows his head to the earth, and his thoughts are altered so that because of the joy that surges throughout his entire body he cannot make prostrations. Therefore, O man, pay attention to what you read here. Indeed, can these things be known from [*writings of*] ink? Or can the taste of honey pass over the palate by reading books? For if you do not strive, you will not find, and if you do not knock at the door with vehemence and keep constant vigil before it, you will not be heard.

Who is the man that, hearing this, will desire outward righteousness,[10] save only he that is unable to persevere in stillness?[11] Yet if there be someone who cannot practise stillness – since it is the grace of God that brings a man within the door – let him not forsake the other way, lest by so doing he have no share in either of the paths of life.

Until the outer man dies to all the doings of the world, not only to sin, but also to every bodily activity, and likewise until the inner man dies to evil thoughts, and the natural stirrings of the body weaken, and the body dies a little by means of labors, so that the sweetness of sin no longer arises in the heart: until such a time the sweetness of the Spirit of God will most certainly not arise in a man, his members will not open themselves to life, and divine thoughts will not enter into his soul, nor be perceived, nor be seen. And until a man has stilled in his heart every concern for the affairs of this life, except for the indispensable needs of his nature, and entrusts this care to God, spiritual inebriation will not overwhelm him, nor will he experience that madness whereof the Apostle was accused. 'Much learning hath made him mad.' Acts 26:24

But when I say these things, I do not mean to banish hope, as

10. I.e. the active virtues.

11. Syriac *to endure the bonds of his cell.*

though only those who have attained to the most sublime perfection can be accounted worthy of God's grace and find consolation. For in very truth, when a man disdains evil actions and separates himself from them entirely and clings to the good, he will quickly sense divine aid. And if he struggle a little, he will find comfort for his soul,
[40] he will gain the remission of his sins, he will be deemed worthy of grace, and will receive a multitude of blessings. Yet such a one is found inferior when compared to the perfection of the man who has banished himself from the world and has found within his soul the mystery of that blessedness which is of the future age, and has laid hold of that thing for which Christ came, to Whom be glory together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 5

On keeping oneself remote from the world and from all things that disquiet the mind

GOD HAS CONFERRED MUCH HONOR upon men with the twofold instruction[1] which He has given them. And from every quarter He has opened a door to enable them to enter into saving knowledge. Ask from nature a true witness concerning yourself, and you will not go astray. Yet even if you turn aside from thence, learn from that second witness[2] and it will place you on the path from which you wandered.

A distracted heart cannot avoid forgetfulness, and wisdom does not open her door before it. He who is enabled to understand with exact knowledge what degree of equality the end of all [*men*] brings, needs no other teacher for renouncing life's affairs. The first book given by God to rational beings was the nature of created things; but the instruction set down in writing was added after the transgression.

Whoever does not voluntarily withdraw himself from the causes of the passions is involuntarily drawn away by sin. These are the causes of sin: wine, women, riches, and robust health of body. Not that by their nature these things are sins, but that nature readily inclines toward the sinful passions on their account, and for this reason a man must guard himself against them with great care. If you bear your weakness constantly in mind, you will not overstep the bounds of caution. With men, poverty is something loathsome; but with God, much more so is a soul whose heart is proud and whose mind is scornful. With men, wealth is honored; but with God, the soul that has come to humility.

Whenever you wish to make a beginning in some good work, first prepare yourself for the temptations that will come upon you, and do not doubt the truth. For it is the enemy's custom, whenever he sees a man beginning a good mode of life with fervent faith, to confront

1. I.e. nature and Scripture.

2. I.e. Scripture.

him with diverse and fearful temptations, so that he should be afraid, his good intention should be chilled, and he should lack the fervor to undertake that God-pleasing work. It is not that our adversary has such power (for then no one could ever do good), but God concedes it to him, as we have learned with the righteous Job. Therefore prepare yourself manfully to encounter the temptations that are brought against the virtues, and then begin to practise them. For if you have not prepared yourself beforehand to meet temptations, then refrain from practising the virtues.

The man who doubts that God is his Helper in good work is put to flight by his own shadow; he starves at a time of prosperity and plenty, and in a period of calm his shipwreck will be severe. But a man whose confidence is in God is stout of heart; his worth is made manifest to all men, and his praise is before the face of his enemies.

God's commandments excel all the treasures of the world, and he who acquires His laws in his heart finds the Lord within them. The man who always goes to bed with rumination upon God has gained Him as his Chamberlain; and he who desires the fulfillment of God's will, will have the angels of heaven as his guides. A man who fears sins will traverse a terrible passage without stumbling, and at a time of darkness he will find light before him and within himself. The Lord carefully watches the steps of the man who fears sins, and God's mercy forestalls him when he slips. A man who considers his transgressions to be slight, falls into worse sins than he formerly committed, and he will pay his penalty sevenfold. Sow your alms in humility, and you will reap mercy at the judgment.

By those means whereby you have lost goods, by the same will you gain them back again. You owe God a penny, and He will not accept a pearl from you in its place. Having lost chastity, do not allow fornication to remain in its place and give alms because of it: God will not accept them, for in place of sanctification He requires sanctification. Although you wrong not the poor, do not allow an unjust possession to remain in its place. You fast from bread: do not leave iniquity in its place and struggle with some other thing. Greed is uprooted by mercy and privation. You have left the plant in its place, and do you struggle with something else?

[43] Saint Ephraim said, 'In summertime, do not struggle against the

scorching heat in winter clothing.' Let each man reap by means that oppose the iniquity he has sown. Every disease is cured with its own remedies. And you, who are overcome by envy, why do you battle against sleep? While the transgression is still small and blossoming, pluck it up, before it spreads and covers the field. Do not be negligent when your fault seems slight to you, for later you will find it an inhuman master, and will be running before it like a shackled slave. But a man who fights against a passion from the start will soon subdue it.

He who is able to suffer wrong with joy, though having means at hand to rebuff it, has consciously received from God the consolation of his faith. The man who endures accusations against himself with humility has arrived at perfection, and he is marvelled at by the holy angels, for there is no other virtue so great and so hard to achieve.

Do not believe yourself to be strong, until you are tempted and find yourself superior to change. In this manner test yourself in everything. Acquire a right faith in yourself, so that you may trample down your enemies; keep your mind lowly, and place no confidence in your strength, lest you be given over to the frailty of your nature, and then, from your own fall you will learn your own weakness. Nor should you trust your knowledge, lest you be found amid subtle snares and you become entangled. Have a meek tongue, and dishonor will never encounter you. Acquire sweet lips, and you will have all men as your friends. Never boast of your labors with your tongue, lest you be put to shame.[3] In each matter about which a man boasts himself, God permits that he change, so that he should be humbled, and learn humility. This is why you must surrender all things to God's foreknowledge, and not believe that there is anything in this life unchanging.

Acting in this manner, your eye will be always lifted to God. For God's protection and providence encircle all men, yet they are not seen except by those who have cleansed themselves from sin and continually keep their attention on God, and on Him alone. But God's providence is especially apparent to them when they enter into a great trial on behalf of the truth; for then they perceive it as if seeing

3. Instead of *lest you be put to shame* the Syriac reads *lest, there being nothing in creation that is free of change, your shame be rendered double when you are found in the contrary* [*state*].

it with their bodily eyes, each man in proportion to the magnitude of the temptation which befalls him and according to the cause thereof. This is the case in order that providence might anoint its champions to have courage in this manner, as with Jacob, and Jesus of Navi, and the Three Children, and Peter, and the rest of the saints, to whom it appeared in a human form,[4] giving them confidence and confirming them in godliness.

[44] But if you say that these things were granted to the saints from God by way of economy, and that it was for special reasons that they were deemed worthy of such visions, then let the holy martyrs be examples to encourage you. The martyrs, often many together, but sometimes one alone, in places both many and diverse, contested for Christ's sake, and with the secret strength that came to them they courageously endured in bodies of clay the lacerations of iron and torments of every kind, things that surpass nature. But also, to such as these, the holy angels would manifestly appear, so that every man might learn that divine providence is very near to those who in every manner endure both every temptation and every affliction for the Lord's sake, for their encouragement and for the shaming of their enemies. For inasmuch as the saints were roused to manliness by visions of this kind, to just such a degree did their adversaries rage and become frenzied with wrath at their unyielding patience.

But what need is there to speak of the ascetics, those strangers to the world, and of the anchorites, who made the desert a city and a dwelling-place and hostelry of angels? For the angels continually visited these men because their modes of life were so similar; and as being troops of a single Sovereign, at all times they kept company with their comrades-in-arms, that is to say, those who embraced the desert all the days of their life, and took up their abode in mountains and in
Heb. 11:38 dens and caves of the earth because of their love for God. And since, having abandoned things earthly, they loved the heavenly and were become imitators of the angels, rightly did those very same holy angels not conceal the sight of themselves from them, and they fulfilled their every wish.

Moreover, from time to time they appeared to them to teach them

4. I.e. the angels sent by God's providence.

how they ought to lead their lives. Sometimes they clarified certain perplexities for them; or sometimes the saints themselves asked them for what was needed. And sometimes they guided them when they had strayed along the way; or sometimes they came to their rescue when they fell into temptations. Sometimes they snatched them from unexpected mishap and peril that overtook them, such as a snake, or a ledge, or a splinter of wood, or a blow from a stone. Or sometimes, when the enemy was openly waging war on the saints, they showed themselves visibly to their eyes and said that they were sent to their aid, and brought them confidence, daring, and refreshment by their words. At other times they performed healings through them; or at times they cured the saints themselves when they fell into certain ailments. Sometimes, when their bodies succumbed from lack of food, with a touch of the hand, or with words, they fortified and strengthened them above nature; or sometimes, they brought them food, loaves of bread (which were oftentimes even hot), and other things for their nourishment. To some of them they foretold their departure; and to others, the very manner of their departing. [45]

But why should we count up the many things that prove the holy angels' love for us, and their special care for the righteous? For just as big brothers do for their little ones, so do they look after us. All these things come to pass so as to assure every man how 'nigh the Lord is unto all that call upon Him in truth,' and how much provision He manifests toward those who have devoted themselves to pleasing Him, and who follow Him with pure hearts. Ps. 144:19

If you believe that God makes provision for you, why be anxious and concerned about temporal affairs and the needs of your flesh? But if you do not believe that God makes provision for you, and for this reason you take pains to provide for your need separately from Him, then you are of all men most miserable. Why even be alive or go on living in such a case? 'Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will nourish thee,' and you shall never be dismayed at any terror that overtakes you. 1 Cor. 15:19 Ps. 54:25 Prov. 3:25

A man who has dedicated himself once and for all to God goes through life with a restful mind. Without non-possessiveness the soul cannot be freed from the turmoil of thoughts; and without stillness of

the senses she will not perceive peace of mind. Without entering into temptations, no man will ever gain the wisdom of the Spirit; and without assiduous reading, he will know no refinement of thoughts. Without tranquillity of thoughts, the mind will not be moved in hidden mysteries; and without the confidence that comes through faith, the soul cannot dare to withstand temptations with boldness. Moreover, without actual experience of God's protection, the heart cannot hope in Him; and if the soul does not taste Christ's sufferings consciously, she will never have communion with Him.

Deem him to be a man of God who by reason of much compassion has mortified himself even with regard to necessary wants; for he who gives alms to a poor man has God to take care of him. And a man who has become poor for His sake has found inexhaustible treasures.

God has no need of anything. But He is gladdened whenever He sees a man comforting His image and honoring it for His sake. When someone asks you for something you have, do not say in your heart, 'I shall keep this for myself, that I may be comforted by it, and God will supply him with his need from elsewhere'; for these are the words of the unrighteous and of those who know not God. A righteous and kindly man does not give his honor to another, nor does he permit an occasion for charity to pass him by unused. The poor and indigent man is provided for by God (because God abandons no one); but as for you, you have shunned the honor given you by God
[46] and have estranged His grace from you by turning a beggar away. So, whenever you give, be glad and say, 'Glory be to Thee, O God, for Thou hast deemed me worthy to find a man to comfort!' But if you do not have anything to give, rejoice the more and say, offering great thanks to God, 'I thank Thee, my God, that Thou hast granted me this grace and honor, to go in want for Thy Name's sake, and hast deemed me worthy to taste the affliction that is set in the path of Thy commandments, with sickness and want, such as Thy saints who walked this path did also taste.'

And whenever you are ill, say, 'Blessed are they who discover the object which God has placed in what He brings upon us to profit us!' For God administers sicknesses for the health of our soul. For one of the saints said, 'I have taken note of the following, that a monk who does not serve the Lord in a God-pleasing manner, who does not

strive earnestly for his soul's salvation, but remains heedless regarding the exercise of virtues, is most assuredly allowed by God to fall prey to temptations so that he be not idle, and from his excessive idleness lapse into a worse state.' This indeed is why God inflicts temptations upon the lazy and heedless, that they may be preoccupied with these and not with frivolous things. This God always does with those who love Him, but if He sees that they begin to disregard His works, He sends a great trial upon them, that He may chasten them, make them wise, and teach them His will. And whenever they pray to Him, He does not quickly hearken to them, but waits until they grow weary and have learned in no uncertain manner that these things befell them because of their slothfulness and negligence. For it is written, 'When ye spread forth your hands unto Me, I will turn Mine eyes from you; and if ye multiply your prayer, I will not hearken unto you.' For even if this was said of others also, nonetheless it is written especially about those who have abandoned the way of the Lord. Isa. 1:15

But since we say that God is plenteous in mercy, why is it that when amidst temptations we unceasingly knock and pray, we are not heard and He disregards our prayer? This we are clearly taught by the Prophet when he says, 'The Lord's hand is not little, that it cannot save; nor is He heavy of hearing, that He cannot hear: but our sins have separated us from Him, and our iniquities have turned His face away, that He doth not hearken.' Remember God at all times, and He will remember you whenever you fall into evils. Isa. 59:1–2

Your nature has become receptive to accidental occurrences, the temptations of the present world have multiplied, and evils are not far from you, but well up inside you when He gives a sign, and from under your feet and from the place where you are standing. As the eyelids come close to each other, even so are temptations close to men. But God has ordered these things with wisdom for your profit, [47] so that you would knock persistently at His door, and that by your fear of what oppresses you the remembrance of Him might be sown in your mind, and you might draw near to Him through your entreaties, and your heart might be sanctified by constant remembrance of Him. When you pray, He will hearken to you. And you will learn that God is the one that delivers you; and you will perceive Him Who fashioned you, provides for you, protects you, and Who has for your

sake created two worlds: one as a teacher,[5] and for a while your chastiser; but the other as your ancestral home and your eternal inheritance.

God did not make you immune to things that are grievous, lest in aspiring to divinity you inherit what Satan inherited. But likewise, neither has He created you undeviating and fixed, lest you be like the nature of creatures not endued with [*rational*] souls, and the good things within you be of no profit to you, and bring you no recompense (as is the case with irrational beasts, since their natural animal merits profit them nothing). For how much benefit, thanksgiving, and humility is produced by the incursion of these spurs is an easy matter for all to learn for themselves.

Now it is clear that to strive after good and to turn away from evil is within our power; thus, the honor and disgrace which come of these are to be ascribed to us. When we are put to shame by disgrace, we are afraid; but receiving honor, we offer thanks to God and stretch ourselves out toward virtue. God has made these instructors plentiful for you, lest being free from them, and immune to and having no part in tribulations, and feeling yourself superior to every fear, you should forget the Lord your God and turn away from Him, and fall to believing in many gods, just as many have done. For although these men had a passible nature like your own, were subject to want, and were scourged with these very griefs, yet in a brief space of time, because of paltry riches, fleeting power, and ephemeral health, they not only fell into polytheism, but in their madness they had the audacity to declare themselves gods by nature.

For this reason, then, He allows you to be amidst afflictions; but sometimes it is in order that you should not by turning away provoke Him to wrath, and He with the meting-out of punishment destroy you utterly from before His face. I shall not speak of ungodliness and the other blasphemies which are bred of a life led in prosperity and in the absence of fear, even though what was mentioned above should
[48] not come to pass.[6] For this reason, then, He has made His remembrance abound in your heart by means of sufferings and griefs, and

5. Syriac *school*.

6. I.e. that one should fall into polytheism or think oneself a god. The last phrase is rendered from the Syriac.

He has spurred you toward the gate of His mercy with the fear of hostile forces. And by means of deliverance from these things, He has implanted in you seeds of love for Him. And when you lay hold of love, He brings you to the honor of sonship, shows you how abundant is His grace and how constant is His care for you. Then He will cause you to perceive both the holiness of His glory and the secret mysteries of His nature's grandeur. Whence could you have known these things, if adversities had never befallen you? Since it is especially owing to these that the love of God can be augmented in your soul, owing, that is, to the perception of His graces and memory of the many acts of His providence. All these good things are born to you from grievous circumstances so that you might learn to give thanks.

Remember God, that He too might always remember you; and when He has kept you in His memory and preserved you safe to the end, you will receive every blessing from Him. Do not forget Him, your mind being distracted with futile concerns, lest He forget you in the time of your warfare. When you enjoy abundance, be obedient to Him, so that in the time of your afflictions you may have boldness before Him through the heart's persevering prayer to Him.

Seat yourself before the Lord continually, keeping the memory of Him in your heart, lest having lingered outside His memory, you are unable to speak boldly when you enter in before Him, because boldness with God comes from constant conversing with Him and from much prayer. Our connection and continuance with men is through the body; but our connection and continuance with God is through the soul's recollection and the vigilance and whole-burnt offering of frequent prayer. From long continuance in recollection of Him, a man is transported at times to astonishment and wonder. For, 'The heart of them that seek the Lord shall rejoice.' 'Seek ye the Lord,' ye condemned, and 'be strengthened' with hope; 'seek His face' through repentance, and sanctify yourselves by the holiness of His face, and you will be thoroughly purged from your sins. Run to the Lord, all you that are guilty of sin, to Him that has the power to pardon sins and overlook transgressions. For He has spoken to His Prophet an oath, saying, 'As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he return and live.' And again, 'I have spread out My

Ps. 104:3, 4

Ezek. 33:11

Isa. 65:2 hands all the day, unto a rebellious and gainsaying people.' And
Ezek. 33:11 again, 'Wherefore do ye die the death, O house of Israel?' And again,
Mal. 3:7 'Return to Me, and I will return unto you.' And again, 'In what day soever the sinner shall return from his way, and return unto the Lord,
[49] and execute judgment and righteousness, I will not remember his iniquities; but living he shall live, saith the Lord. And if the righteous shall forsake his righteousness, and if sinning he do wrong, I will not remember his righteousness, but will lay a stumbling-block before him; and he shall die in the darkness of his works, because he abode
Ezek. 33:14–15 in them.' Why so? Because the sinner will not stumble over his sin when he returns to the Lord. And the righteousness of the just will not redeem him when he sins, if he persists in such sinning.

But God spoke this also to Jeremias, 'Take thee a parchment, and write all things that I have spoken unto thee from the days of Josias king of Judah unto this day, all the evil things that I spake unto thee, saying that I would bring them upon this people: that when he hath heard it and been afraid, a man might forsake his wicked way; and re-
Jer. 43 (36):2–3 turning they may repent, and I may take away their sins.' And Wisdom has said, 'He that covereth his sin shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth his sins, and leaveth the same behind him, shall bring
Prov. 28:13 down mercy from God.' And Esaias says: 'Seek ye the Lord, and when ye have found Him, call upon Him: and when He shall draw nigh, let the sinner forsake his privy way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts, and return unto Me, and I will have mercy upon you. For
Isa. 55:6–9 My thoughts are not as your thoughts, neither are My ways as your
Isa. 1:19 ways.' 'If then ye hear Me, ye shall eat the good of the land.' Come unto Me and obey Me, and with your soul ye shall live! Whenever you keep the ways of the Lord and do His will, then put your hope in the Lord and call on Him; and 'as soon as ye cry out, He will say to
Isa. 58:9 you: "Behold, I am here!"'

When temptation overtakes the iniquitous man, he has no confidence wherewith to call upon God, nor to expect salvation from Him, since in the days of his ease he stood aloof from God's will. Before the war begins, seek after your ally; before you fall ill, seek out your physician; and before grievous things come upon you, pray, and in the time of your tribulations you will find Him, and He will hearken to you. Before you stumble, call out and make supplication; and be-

fore you make a vow, have ready what things you promise, for they are your provisions afterwards. The ark of Noah was built in the time of peace, and its timbers were planted by him a hundred years beforehand. In the time of wrath the iniquitous perished,[7] but the ark became the shelter for the righteous man.

The iniquitous mouth is stopped during prayer, for the condemnation of the conscience deprives a man of his boldness. A good heart joyously sheds tears in prayer. Voluntary and steadfast endurance of injustice purifies the heart. Patient endurance of injustice springs from disdain for the world; and a man endures calumny cheerfully because his heart has begun to behold the truth. Joy arising from voluntary endurance of calumny and injustice exalts the heart. They for [50] whom the world is dead submit to contumelies with joy. But they for whom the world still lives cannot submit to injustice: either, moved by vainglory, they are provoked to anger and are troubled, being stirred up in the manner of brutes, or else they are overcome by grief. O how difficult it is to attain this virtue,[8] and how much glory it procures from God! He who would attain to this virtue must depart from his kinsmen and live the life of a stranger, for he cannot attain it in his homeland. Only such as are great and mighty are fit to endure the anguish of this virtue among their kindred; to these this world has died, and they have no hope of consolation from this present age.

As grace accompanies humility, so do painful incidents accompany pride. The eyes of the Lord are upon the humble to make them glad; but the face of the Lord is against the proud to make them humble. Humility always receives mercy from God; but hardness of heart and littleness of faith contend with fearful encounters until suddenly and unexpectedly disaster rises up against them and surrenders them to speedy destruction. In all respects belittle yourself before all men, and you will be raised above the princes of this age. Anticipate every person with your greeting and your bow, and you will be more highly prized than those who bring the gold of Souphir as a gift. 3 Kgs. 10:11

Be contemptible in your own eyes, and you will see the glory of God in yourself. For where humility burgeons, there God's glory wells forth. If you strive to be slighted openly by all men, God will

7. Syriac *the iniquitous, who lived calmly in their iniquity, were perturbed.*

8. I.e. to be forbearing while being wronged.

cause you to be glorified. If you have humility in your heart, then in your heart God will show you His glory. Be disdained in your greatness, and not great in your insignificance. Endeavor to be despised, and you will be filled with the honor of God. Seek not to be honored while within you are filled with wounds. Deprecate honor, that you may be honored; and do not love it, that you be not dishonored. Honor flees away from before the man that runs after it; but he who flees from it, the same will it hunt down, and will become to all men a herald of his humility. If you treat yourself with contempt so as to be honored, God will expose you publicly; yet if you disparage yourself for the sake of the truth, God will move all His creatures to hymn your praise. They will open up before you the door of your Creator's glory, and they will praise you like the Creator because you are truly in His image and after His likeness.

Who has seen a man shining throughout with the virtues, but vile-seeming to men: radiant in his life, wise in knowledge, and humble in his spirit? Blessed is he who humbles himself in all things, for he will be exalted in all. For a man who for God's sake humbles himself, and thinks meanly of himself, is glorified by God. The man who hungers
[51] and thirsts for God's sake, God will make drunk with His good things.[9] And he who goes naked for God's sake is clad by Him in a robe of incorruption and glory. And he who becomes poor for His sake is consoled with His true riches. Set yourself at naught for God's sake, and without your knowing it, your glory will be multiplied all through your life. Hold yourself a sinner, that you may be righteous throughout your life. Be scorned when you are wise and do not be a fool in your wisdom. Be unlearned in your wisdom, and do not seem wise, being unlearned. And if humility exalts the simple and ignorant, consider how much honor it will procure for the great and highly esteemed!

Flee vainglory, and you will be glorified; fear pride, and you will be magnified. For pomposity has not been assigned to the sons of men, nor haughtiness to the offspring of women. If you have voluntarily renounced all things in this life, by no means quarrel with any man over anything at all. If you have come to detest praise, avoid those who chase after glory. Avoid the acquisitive even as you would

9. Syriac *with that wine whose inebriation never passes from those who drink it.*

acquisition. Keep yourself away from the wanton even as you would from wantonness. Avoid the intemperate even as you would intemperance. For if even the memory of the people mentioned troubles our thought, how much more will the sight of them and the life conducted by them? Draw nigh to the righteous, and through them you will come near to God. Associate with those who have humility, and you will learn their ways. For if the mere sight of those here mentioned is beneficial, how much more the example of their lives and instruction of their mouths?

Love the poor, that through them you may also find mercy. Do not keep company with the disputatious, lest you be forced to take leave of your calm. Bear the noisome smells of the sick without disgust, and especially of the poor, since you too are wrapped about with a body. Do not rebuke those who are afflicted in heart, lest you be scourged with the selfsame rod as theirs: then you will seek consolation and will find none. Do not disdain those who are deformed from birth, because all of us will go to the grave equally privileged. Love sinners, but hate their works; and do not despise them for their faults, lest you be tempted by the same. Remember that you share the earthly nature of Adam and that you are clothed with his infirmity. Do not reprove those who are in need of your prayer, and do not withhold tender words of comfort from them, lest they perish and their souls be required of you; but do as the physicians, who cure the diseases which are more feverish with cooling remedies, and the more chilling with their opposites.

When you meet your fellow man, constrain yourself to pay him more honor than is his due. Kiss his hands and feet, often take his hands with deep respect, put them over your eyes, and praise him for what he does not even possess. And when he parts from you, say [52] every good thing about him, and whatever it may be that commands respect. For by these and similar acts, you draw him to good and make him feel ashamed because of the gracious names by which you have called him, and you sow the seeds of virtue in him. From behavior such as this, to which you accustom yourself, a good pattern is also imprinted in you; and you gain much humility for yourself, and achieve great things without toil. And not only this, but if he has any faults or voluntary imperfections, he will readily accept correction

from you when he is honored by you, being ashamed because of the respect which you have shown him and the proof of love he continually sees in you.

Let this always be the aim of your conduct: to be courteous and respectful to all. And do not provoke any man or vie zealously with him, either for the sake of the Faith, or on account of his evil deeds; but watch over yourself not to blame or accuse any man in any matter. For we have a Judge in the heavens Who is impartial. But if you would have that man return to the truth, be grieved over him and, with tears and love, say a word or two unto him; but do not be inflamed with anger against him, lest he see within you signs of hostility. For love does not know how to be angry, or provoked, or passionately to reproach anyone. The proof of love and knowledge is profound humility, which is born of a good conscience in Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, even unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 6

That to our profit God has permitted the soul to be susceptible to accidents; and on ascetical activities

THE FACT THAT A MAN SLIPS into accidental sins demonstrates the weakness of his nature; for to our profit God has permitted our nature to be susceptible to sinful occurrences. For He has not thought it good to make the soul superior to these occurrences before the second regeneration. It is profitable for the soul to be susceptible to accidental sins because this pricks the conscience. To persist in them, however, is audacious and shameful. There are three ways by which every rational soul can draw nigh to God: by fervency of faith, by fear, and by the Lord's chastisement. No man can draw nigh to the love of God if one of these three does not lead the way.

Just as turbulence of the thoughts is born of gluttony, so ignorance and frivolousness of the mind are born of talkativeness and unruly conversations. Concern for the affairs of this life disturbs the soul, and the distraction of works confuses the mind and casts out its serenity.

The monk who has given himself over to a celestial husbandry must always and continuously be without any care for the things of this life, so that when he enters inside himself, he will find nothing at all of the present age there, nor thought concerning anything visible. For when he is unengaged with these things, he will be able without distraction to meditate in the law of the Lord both day and night. Ps. 1:2
Bodily labors unaccompanied by purity of mind are like a barren womb and withered breasts, for they cannot bring a man to the knowledge of God. They greatly weary the body, yet they take no pains to uproot the passions from the mind. For this reason bodily labors reap no harvest.

Like a man who sows in a briar patch and then is unable to reap, such is the man who corrupts his thinking with anxiety, remembrance

of wrongs, and covetousness, and then groans upon his bed because of his many vigils and great abstinence. Scripture testifies concerning this, saying: 'As a people that had done righteousness and had not forsaken the commandments of the Lord, they now ask of Me righteousness and truth and wish to draw nigh to Me, their God, saying, Why have we fasted and Thou regardest not? Why have we humbled ourselves and Thou didst not know it? Nay, in the day of your fasts
Isa. 58:2, 3 ye do your own wills,' that is, your wicked desires. Ye offer them as whole-burnt offerings unto idols; and unto the wretched thoughts, which ye reckon in yourselves as gods, ye daily sacrifice your free will, a thing more precious than all incense, which ye ought rather to consecrate unto Me by your good works and your purity of conscience.

Good soil which gladdens its husbandman by bringing forth fruit a hundredfold is a soul that is made radiant by the remembrance of God and unsleeping vigil both day and night. The Lord establishes on her steadfastness a cloud that overshadows her by day and with a flaming light He illuminates her by night. Within her darkness, a light shines.

As a cloud veils the light of the moon, so the vapors of the belly banish the wisdom of God from the soul. What the flame of fire is to dry wood, this also is bodily lust to a full belly. As combustible matter added to combustible matter increases the flames of a fire, so succulence of foods increases the lustful movements of the body. The knowledge of God does not dwell in a pleasure-loving body, and the man who loves his own body will not obtain divine gifts. Just as from labor-pangs a fruit is born that delights its mother, so from toil there is born in the soul the knowledge of the mysteries of God; but slothful and pleasure-loving men reap the fruit of shame. As a father cares for his child, so Christ also cares for the body enduring hardship for His sake, and He is near to its mouth at all times. Priceless is the possession of labor wrought with wisdom.

A stranger is he whose mind is estranged from all things of life. A mourner[1] is he who passes all the days of his life in hunger and thirst for the sake of his hope in good things to come. A monk is he who remains outside the world and is ever supplicating God to receive fu-

1. In Syriac this also means *monk*.

ture blessings.[2] A monk's wealth is the comfort that comes of mourning and the joy that comes of faith, which shines in the secret places of his mind. A merciful man is he who does not distinguish mentally between men, but has mercy on all alike.

A virgin is not merely one who keeps his body undefiled by intercourse, but one who feels shame before himself even when he is [55] alone. If you love chastity, banish shameful thoughts by exercising yourself in reading and prolonged prayer; then you will be inwardly armed against their natural causes. But without reading and prayer, purity cannot be present in the soul.

If you wish to acquire mercifulness and almsgiving, first accustom yourself to disdain all things, lest by their oppressiveness your mind be drawn away from its self-imposed aim. For the exactness of mercy is shown in patiently enduring injustice. The perfection of humility is to bear false accusations with joy. If you are truly merciful, do not grieve inwardly when you are unjustly deprived of something you possess, and do not tell others of your loss. Nay rather, let the loss you suffer from others be swallowed up by your mercy, as the sharp edge of wine is swallowed up by much water. Show the fullness of your mercy by the good with which you repay those who have done you injustice, as did the blessed Elisseus with his enemies who intended to take him captive. For when he prayed and their eyes were blind- 4 Kgs. 6:13–23 ed by mist, he manifested the power that was in him, and if he had wished, they would have been annihilated before him; and when he gave them to eat and drink and permitted them to depart, he manifested the mercy that was in him.

A man who is truly humble is not troubled when he is wronged, and he says nothing to justify himself against the injustice, but he accepts slander as truth; he does not attempt to persuade men that he is calumniated, but he begs forgiveness. Some have voluntarily drawn upon themselves the repute of being licentious, while they are not such; others have endured the charge of adultery, being far from it,[3] and proclaimed by their tears that they bear the fruit of the sin they

2. Syriac *who making his dwelling far from the world's spectacles, has the desire of the world to come as the only entreaty of his prayer.*

3. St. Macarius the Great. *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers,* E. A. Wallis Budge, Chatto & Windus, London, 1907, Vol. I, pp. 271–3, henceforth referenced as Budge, *PHF.*

had not committed, and have wept, asking their offenders' forgiveness for the iniquity they had not done, their souls all the while being crowned with all purity and chastity; others, lest they be glorified because of the virtuous state which they have hidden within them, have pretended to be lunatics, while in truth they were permeated with divine salt and securely fixed in serenity, so that, because of their uttermost perfection, they had holy angels as heralds of their deeds of valor.[4]

You think that you possess humility. Other men accuse themselves; but while you cannot even bear to be accused by others, you reckon yourself humble. If you are humble, by these things try yourself: whether or not you are troubled when you suffer injustice.

John 14:2 The Saviour calls the *many mansions* of His Father's house the noetic levels of those who dwell in that land, that is, the distinctions of the gifts and the spiritual degrees which they noetically take delight in, as well as the diversity of the ranks of the gifts. But by this He did not mean that each person [*yonder*] will be confined in his existence
[56] by a separate spatial dwelling and by the manifest distinguishing mark of the diverse placement of each man's abode. Rather, it resembles how each one of us derives a unique benefit from this visible sun through a single enjoyment of it common to all, each according to the clarity of his eyesight and the ability of his pupils to contain the sun's constant effusion of light. And again, it is just as a lamp in one house diversely distributes the benefit of its light, although by the diversity of its appearance the lamp is not substantially divided up into many, losing the simplicity of its radiance. For, in the same manner, those who at the appointed time will be deemed worthy of that realm will dwell in one abode which will not be divided into a multitude of separate parts. And according to the rank of his discipline each man draws delight for himself from one noetic Sun in one air, one place, one dwelling, one vision, and one outward appearance.

He whose measure is less will not see the great measure of his neighbor's rank, lest [*he should think that*] this arises from the multitude of his neighbor's gifts and the fewness of his own, and this very thing should become for him a cause of sadness and mental anguish.

4. E.g., St. Symeon of Emesa, the fool for Christ (+ end of 6th century). He is celebrated on July 21.

Far be it that one should suppose such a thing to occur in that realm of delights! Each man inwardly takes delight in the gift and the lofty rank whereof he has been deemed worthy. But the vision[5] that is outside them all is one, and the place is one. And what is truly greater, their dwelling will be like that of the angelic host in the unity of an ethereal place, in the uniformity of the clear vision and the secret knowledge which belongs to their own ranks, through the revelations of divine vision which differ according to their orders. If, indeed, eternal beings possess, beyond the operation of sense perception, intellections of the mind, then no one will be so bold as to declare by his words that in the world to come there will be an order of things differing from this one, that is, from [*the order of*] the understanding, and what is beyond, though indeed, on account of the perfection of nature [*then*], this is very evident. True, therefore, is the word spoken by the Fathers that, on the one hand, ignorance will exist for an undetermined time and, on the other hand, there is a time reserved for the revelation of its[6] abolition and also [*for the revelation*] of the rest of those special mysteries regarding the Supreme Being which are delimited by silence. Besides the state that is completely on high and the state that is absolutely below, in the future separation there will be no middle realm between them. A man will either belong entirely to those [*who dwell*] on high, or entirely to those below; but within both one state and the other there are varying degrees of recompenses. 1 Cor. 13:12

If this is true, which it most certainly is, what is more senseless and foolish than those who say that 'It is sufficient for me to escape Gehenna, but I do not seek to enter into the Kingdom'! For to escape Gehenna means precisely to enter the Kingdom, even as to fall away from the Kingdom is to enter Gehenna. Scripture has not taught us the existence of three realms, but, 'When the Son of man shall come in His glory, He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.' He did not speak of three orders, but two: one on the right and one on the left. And He definitely separated the distinctions of their dwelling-places, saying, 'The righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,' but 'sinners shall depart into everlasting fire.' And again, 'Many shall come from the east and west, [57] Matt. 25:31, 33 Matt. 13:43 Matt. 25:41

5. I.e. that which is seen.

6. I.e. ignorance's.

and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the
Matt. 8:11–12 outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth,' a thing more dreadful than any fire. Have you not understood by these things that falling short of the order on high is, namely, the Gehenna of torment?

It is an excellent thing to teach men that which is good and by constant care to draw them away from delusion and into the knowledge of life. This is the path of Christ and the apostles, and it is very lofty. But if a man perceives in himself that through such a way of life and continual communion with men his conscience is weakened by seeing external things, his serenity is disturbed, and his knowledge is darkened (since his mind must still be guarded and his senses must still be held in submission), and that while he seeks to heal others he loses his own health, and departing from the chaste freedom of his will, his mind is shaken; then let him remember the apostolic exhortation
Heb. 5:14 which says, 'Strong food belongeth to them that are more perfect.' Let him turn back, lest he hear from the Lord the words of the
Luke 4:23 proverb, 'Physician, heal thyself,' let him condemn himself, let him watch over his own good health. Instead of audible words, let his excellent manner of life serve for edification; and instead of the sounds of his mouth, let his works teach others; and when he keeps his soul healthy, let him profit others and heal them by his own good health. For when he is far from men he can benefit them even more by the zeal of his good works than by his words, since he himself is sickly and is in greater need of healing than they. For, 'If the blind lead the
Matt. 15:14 blind, both shall fall into the ditch.' Strong food belongs to those who
Heb. 5:14 are healthy, whose senses are exercised, who are able to take every kind of nourishment – that is, the invasions of all the senses – and by reason of their training in perfection are able to endure every encounter without their heart being harmed.

[58] When the devil wishes to defile with recollections of fornication a mind that is resplendent with purity, he first tests its constancy by the love of vainglory, since the inception of this thought has no appearance of passion. He constantly acts thus with men who guard their mind and in whom he cannot readily introduce an unseemly thought. But when a man departs from his fortress through converse with the

first thought and moves away from his refuge, the devil immediately confronts him with something pertaining to fornication and turns his mind to licentious subjects.

At first the man is troubled by this sudden onslaught, since his thoughts were formerly chaste, and his chastity had forestalled those things from the sight of which his governing mind was separated. Yet even though he was not completely defiled, the devil has succeeded in debasing him from his former dignity. But if he does not turn back and swiftly seize upon his first thoughts [*of vainglory*] – which are the cause of the second – when he often encounters these things, then through the frequency of their occurrence this habit will blind his soul's faculty of discernment.[7] Thus, the greater the magnitude and extent of the first passion, the greater is the subjugation to the second.

It is better and easier to elude the passions by the recollection of the virtues than by resisting and disputing with them. For when the passions leave their place and arise for battle, they imprint on the mind images and idols, and this warfare has great force, able to weaken the mind and violently to perturb and confuse a man's thinking. But if a man acts by the first rule we have mentioned, when the passions are repulsed they leave no trace in the mind.

Purity is guarded by bodily toil and study of the divine Scriptures; toil is made steadfast by hope and fear; and hope and fear are established in the mind by withdrawal from men and unceasing prayer. Until a man has received the Comforter, he requires the divine Scriptures[8] to imprint the memory of good in his heart, to keep his striving for good constantly renewed by continual reading, and to preserve his soul from the subtleties of the ways of sin; for he has not yet acquired the power of the Spirit that drives away that delusion which takes soul-profiting recollections captive and makes a man cold through the distraction of his mind. When the power of the Spirit has penetrated the noetic powers of the active soul, then in place of the law of the Scriptures,[9] the commandments of the Spirit take root in his heart and a man is secretly taught by the Spirit and needs no help

7. This is the Syriac reading. The Greek printed text and many Greek MSS read *But if he recoils and thwarts the first assault of the thoughts* [*of vainglory*], *which is the cause of the invasion of the second, then with God's help he can easily subdue the passion.*

8. Syriac *inscriptions in ink*, i.e. the written word in general.

9. Syriac *laws* [*written*] *in ink*.

from sensory matter. For, so long as it is from matter that the heart has its teaching, error and forgetfulness straightway follow the lesson; but when teaching comes from the Spirit, its memory is kept inviolate.

[59] There are good thoughts and good volitions; there are evil thoughts and an evil heart. The first without the second are little accounted for a recompense. The first level[10] is a movement that passes through the mind like a sea wind that stirs up the waves; but the second level[11] is a groundwork and a foundation, and in proportion to the extent of the foundation – and not according to the movement of the thoughts – the recompense for good and evil is meted out. The soul does not have rest from the movement of changing thoughts; and if you were to mete out a recompense for each thought, though it has no foundation in the heart, nearly ten thousand times a day you would change your good [*recompenses*] and determine your judgment.

The mind that has newly come forth from the intricate bonds of the passions by repentance, and strives to rise above earthly matters at the time of prayer, is an unfledged bird; and since it is still unable to take flight, it hops upon the face of the earth where the serpent slithers. Yet with the help of reading, labor, fear, and care for the many virtues, it gathers together its deliberations, for it is incapable of knowing anything else except these. And for a short time this keeps the mind unperturbed and undefiled; but later, memories arise, and these trouble and defile the heart. For the man has not yet sensed the still air of freedom which gathers the mind for a long span of time by forgetting all earthly things. For the mind has acquired only physical feathers, that is, virtues performed outwardly, but has not yet beheld the divine vision belonging to the virtues it practises, and it has not perceived that this is the wing of the mind wherewith it draws nigh to celestial things and takes leave of those of earth.

So long as a man serves the Lord through palpable things, images of these things imprint themselves in his thoughts, and he reflects upon the Divine in material images. But whenever he receives perception of that which lies within things, immediately, according to the measure of that perception, his mind will be exalted above the images of things at sundry times.

10. I.e. the thoughts.

11. I.e. the volition and the heart.

'The eyes of the Lord are upon the humble of heart, and His ears are opened unto their supplication.' The prayer of a humble man is like a word spoken from the mouth into an ear: 'O Lord my God, Thou wilt enlighten my darkness.' Ps. 33:15 Ps. 17:28

When you dwell in stillness and possess the work of humility, this will be a sign for you that your soul is nigh to emerging from darkness: your heart is aflame and hot like fire both day and night, such that all the world is for you refuse and ashes, and you have no desire even for food by reason of the sweetness of the new and flaming thoughts constantly arising in your soul. Suddenly like a freely flowing torrent you are given fountains of tears mingled with all your [60] works: with your reading, your prayer, your psalmody, your reflection, your eating and drinking, and to your every work your tears are joined.

When you see this in your soul, be of good courage, for you have crossed the sea. And so add to your labors, stand watchfully on guard, that grace may increase in you day by day. But if you have not experienced this, you have not yet completed your journey to reach the mountain of God. If, however, after you have found and received the gift of tears, they cease, and your fervency should cool, though there be no other change, as for instance bodily infirmity, then woe to you! What you have lost! For you have fallen into self-esteem, or heedlessness, or sloth. But what follows upon tears once a man has received them, and what he afterwards encounters, we shall describe in another place, in the chapters on the successive order of [*monastic*] disciplines,[12] even as we have been enlightened by the Scriptures and the Fathers, to whom these mysteries have been entrusted.

If you have no works, do not speak on virtues. Afflictions suffered for the Lord's sake are more precious to Him than every vow and sacrifice; and the odor of their sweat surpasses every fragrance and choice incense. Regard every virtue performed without bodily toil as premature, stillborn fruit of the womb. The offering of the righteous is the tears of their eyes; and their acceptable sacrifice is their sighings during vigil. The righteous, burdened by the weight of their body,

12. See Homily 18. This is the Syriac reading. The phrase might also be translated *on the course of the* [*monastic*] *way of life,* or *on the course of the governance* [*of the world*]. Taking this latter sense the Greek has *on providence.*

cry out dolefully to the Lord and send forth their supplications to God with pain; and at the cry of their voice, the angelic orders stand close at hand to aid them, to encourage them with hope, and to comfort them. For the holy angels are partakers of the sufferings and the tribulations of the saints through their nearness to them.

Rightly directed labors and humility make a man a god upon earth. Faith and mercy speed him on the way to limpid purity. Fervency and contrition of heart cannot dwell simultaneously in one soul, even as drunken men cannot have control of their thinking. For when the soul is given this fervor, the contrition of mourning is taken away. Wine has been given for gladness, and fervor for the rejoicing of the soul. The former warms the body, and the word of God the understanding. Those who are inflamed by fervor are ravished by the meditations of hope, and their mind is caught away to the future age. Just as men drunken with wine imagine diverse hallucinations, even so men drunken and made fervent by hope are conscious neither of affliction nor of anything worldly. This, and other like things that are
[61] prepared for those who journey the path of successive disciplines after they have practised the prolonged labors of purification, occur in the very beginning of the way to the simpler of heart and more fervent in hope, and this is by reason of the soul's faith alone. All that
Ps. 134:6 the Lord willeth, He doeth.

Blessed are they who for the sake of their love of God have girded their loins with simplicity and an unquestioning disposition to meet the sea of afflictions, and do not turn their backs! Such men speedily find refuge in the promised haven, and find rest in the tents of those who have toiled well; their souls are led out of their tribulations and they exult in the joy of their hope. Those who hasten onward with hope do not turn their gaze toward the perils of the way, nor do they stop to examine it, but only when they have crossed the sea do they look back upon the treacherous path and give thanks unto God for how He delivered them from gorges, precipices, and the craggy way, while they knew it not. Those, however, who ponder over many deliberations, who strongly desire to be prudent and give themselves over to intricate and quailing thoughts, who are ever making ready and striving to foresee every peril, are (for the most part) always to be found sitting on the doorstep of their houses.

'When the sluggard is sent in the way, he saith, There is a lion in the way and murderers in the streets.' And those who say, like the sons of Israel, 'There we saw the sons of giants, and we were before them as grasshoppers,' are those who will be found still journeying on the way at the time of their death, who always desire to be very prudent, but who never wish at all to make a beginning. The simple and unlearned man who sets out swimming passes through the waters retaining his first ardor, having no care at all for his body, nor deliberating in himself whether his endeavor will in any wise succeed. Prov. 22:13 Num. 13:33

Let not your much wisdom become a stumbling-block to your soul and a snare before you; but trusting in God, manfully make a beginning upon the way that is filled with blood, lest always you be found wanting and naked of the knowledge of God. For he who is fearful or watches the winds, sows not. Death in battle for God's sake is better than a shameful and sluggish life. When you wish to begin one of the works of God, first make a testament, like one who is no longer to live in this life, like a man who is prepared for death and has despaired of his present life, and as though you have reached your fore-appointed time. Hold this unwaveringly in your mind, that hope for this present life may not hinder you from struggling and being victorious. For the hope of this present life enfeebles the thinking. Therefore do not be over-wise, but rather give place in your mind to faith, and remember the days after your death, and slackness will never enter in upon you, [62] according to the word of the wise man who said, 'A thousand years of the present age are not like one day in the age of the righteous.' Begin every good work with fortitude, and do not undertake such labors with a divided soul; and let not your heart waver in its hope in the grace of God, lest your toil be profitless and the work of your husbandry be burdensome. Believe with your heart that the Lord is merciful and gives grace to those who seek Him, not in proportion to our works, but according to the ardent love of our souls and our faith in Him. For He says, 'As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' Eccles. 11:4 Ps. 89:4 Matt. 8:13

The works of those who live according to God are the following: one man strikes his head all the day long, and does this instead of the hours of his services. Another joins together the set number of his prayers by persevering in continual prostrations. Another replaces

the services by copious tears and this suffices him, because it seems better to him than anything else. Another is zealous in the meditation of his understanding and limits his appointed rule to this. Another torments his soul with hunger to the extent that he cannot perform the services. Another makes his service unceasing by continuing in ardent study of the Psalms. Another passes his time in reading, and so kindles his heart. Another is taken captive as he comprehends the divine meaning of the divine Scriptures. Another is restrained from his customary study and is held by silence in his astonishment at the wonders of the verses.

But another, having tasted all these things and taken his fill, turned back and became inactive. Another, having tasted but a little of these things, became puffed up and fell into error. Another is prevented from keeping to his rule by grievous illness and weakness; yet another by the predominance of some habit, or desire, or ambition, or vainglory, or covetousness, or the desire to amass wealth. And another made progress, stood firmly, and did not turn back until he received the pearl of great price.

Therefore always make a beginning in God's work with joy and earnestness. And if you are pure from the passions and a doubting heart, God Himself will raise you up to the summit, help you, and make you wise according to His will, and in a wondrous way you will receive perfection. To Him be glory and dominion and adoration and majesty, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.[13]

13. The Syriac places a note here, *End of the Six Homilies on the Discipline of Virtue.*

Homily 7

On the kinds of hope in God;
and for whom it is right to put his hope in God, and who it is
that entertains such hope foolishly and imprudently

THERE IS A HOPE[1] in God that comes through the faith of the heart, which is good, and which one possesses with discernment and knowledge. And there is another, a false hope, which is distorted and which derives its existence from folly. The man who pays no heed at all to the things that perish, but devotes himself entirely to the Lord both night and day, who gives thought to nothing worldly because of his great assiduity in the virtues, and occupies his every leisure moment with divine things, and who for this reason neglects to procure food and clothing for himself, and the preparation of a place of shelter for his body, and all the rest: this man rightly and knowingly hopes in the Lord, for He will prepare his necessities for him. This truly is the hope which is both true and most wise.

It is right for such a man to put his hope in God, inasmuch as he is His servant, and is diligent in His work, being free of any negligence due to any cause soever. To a man such as this, it is meet that God manifest His special attention, because he has kept His commandment which says, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,' and, 'Make no provision for the flesh.' Whenever we manage ourselves in this way, the world, like some servant, will prepare all things for us, and will unhesitatingly submit to our words as to her masters, and will never set herself against our will. For it is so as not to desist from his constant standing before God that such a man does not allow himself to give thought to the necessities of his body. And because he takes no thought for anything else, and is equally void of all care for things small or great which produce comfort or diversion or departure from

Matt. 6:33

Rom. 13:14

1. The Syriac word has the further sense of *trust, confidence.*

the fear of God, he will be marvellously furnished even with these things, having neither given them thought nor labored for them.

Very different, however, is the case with the man whose heart is completely buried in earthly concerns, who constantly eats dust with
Gen. 3:14 the serpent, who gives no thought at all to what is pleasing to God, who expends all his labors on corporeal things, who is lax, who is continually engaged in concerns and the diversion of wantonness, and who grasps at every pretext for this. Because such a man has fallen away from virtue through his sloth and indolence, it is a different case with him whenever he suffers affliction, or is deprived of some needful thing, or the fruits of his foolish deeds cause him distress, and he says, 'I shall put my hope in God, and He will relieve me of my worry, and bring me comfort.' O fool, until the present hour you would not remember God, but have insulted Him with your dissolute practices, and His Name is blasphemed among the heathen through
Rom. 2:24 you, even as it is written, and now you dare to say with mouth open wide, 'In Him shall I hope, and He will help me, and take care for my concern'? Well has God said by His prophet to the shame of such persons, 'They seek Me daily, and would learn My ways, as they that do righteousness and do not forsake the ordinances of their God;
Isa. 58:2 they ask of Me judgment and righteousness.' He is a fool, therefore, who even mentally does not draw nigh to God, and yet, when he is surrounded by tribulations, lifts his hands to Him with confidence. This man must be seared with hot iron many times over so that somehow he might be instructed. He possesses no work deserving of confidence in God. Rather, with his grievous practices, and his negligence of his duties, he has rendered himself deserving of chastisement; yet for His mercy's sake, God, Who is long-suffering, endures him.

Therefore let not such a one deceive himself, and forget the level of his conduct, and say that he hopes in God; for he will be chastised. When he does not possess the works of faith, let him not stretch out his feet in idleness and say, 'I trust God will provide me with my necessities,' as though he were living in the labors of God. If, on account of his own foolishness, such a one falls into a well while he is walking, he says immediately (although formerly God had never entered his mind at all), 'And as for what happens now, I shall hope in

God, and He will deliver me.' Err not, O fool! Toil for God's sake and sweat in His husbandry precede hope in Him. If you believe in [65]
God, you do well, but faith has need of labors also, and confidence in Jas. 2:19 ff.
God is the good witness of the conscience born of undergoing hardship for the virtues. Do you believe that God provides for His creatures, and is able to do all things? Let suitable labor, therefore, follow on your faith, and then He will hear you. Think not to grasp the winds in your fist, that is, faith without works. Prov. 30:4

Often it happens that a man unwittingly travels a road where there lies an evil wild beast, or murderers, or something of the kind. But the universal providence of God delivers him from injury, either by delaying him on his way for some reason until the dangerous beast has gone off, or by an encounter with someone, to make him turn aside from the road. And again, sometimes a venomous serpent is found lying in the road unseen, but God, not willing to surrender the man to this trial, suddenly makes the serpent hiss and withdraw from the place, or slither out in front of him, and the wayfarer when he sees it is put on his guard, and is saved from it, even though he is undeserving on account of his secret sins, which only he knows; yet God still rescues him, for His mercy's sake. And again, it often happens that a house, or a wall, or a stone is about to fall, and it slips from its place with a splintering sound, but people are found sitting there, and in His love for men God commands an angel to hold it back, and to keep it from falling until they rise up from thence; or else, under a certain pretext, He leads them out, so that no one is found underneath. But as soon as they go out, He straightway lets it fall. And even if it happens that someone is caught, He works the matter so that they are in no way hurt. By this God wishes to show the infinite magnitude of His power.

All these things and their like, therefore, belong to God's universal and catholic providence, and this grace the righteous man has inseparably with him. For God has bidden other men to manage their affairs with discretion, and to combine their own knowledge with God's providence; but the righteous man has no need to manage his affairs through that knowledge, because instead of that knowledge he possesses faith, by means of which he 'casteth down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.' And he will fear 2 Cor. 10:5

none of the things here enumerated, as it is written, 'The righteous
Prov. 28:1 man is bold as a lion,' daring all things through faith, not as one who tempts the Lord, but as one who has confidence in Him, and as one who is armed and arrayed in the power of the Holy Spirit. And because God is his constant concern, God will also say concerning him, 'I am with him in affliction, and I will rescue him, and glorify him,
[66] with length of days will I satisfy him, and I will show him My salva-
Ps. 90:15–16 tion.' The man who is lax, on the other hand, and who is indolent in his labor, cannot have that hope. This, then, belongs only to him who uninterruptedly abides in God in all things, who draws near Him through the beauty of his works, and strains the gaze of his heart unceasingly toward His grace, as the divine David has said, 'from my
Ps. 68:4 hoping in my God, mine eyes have failed me.' For unto Him is due glory, honor, and worship unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 8

On what helps a man to approach God in his heart, and what is the real cause that secretly brings help near him; and again, what is the cause that leads a man to humility

BLESSED IS THE MAN who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, root, and beginning of all goodness. For whenever a man learns and truly perceives his own weakness, at that moment he contracts his soul on every side from the laxity that dims knowledge, and he treasures up watchfulness in himself. But no one can perceive his own infirmity if he is not allowed to be tempted a little, either by things that oppress his body, or his soul. For then, comparing his own weakness with God's help, he will straightway understand the greatness of the latter. And again, whenever he looks over the multitude of his devisings, and his wakefulness, his abstinence, the sheltering, and the hedging about of his soul by which he hopes to find assurance for her, and yet sees that he has not obtained it; or again, if his heart has no calm because of his fear and trembling: then at that moment let him understand, and let him know that this fear of his heart shows and reflects that he is altogether in need of some other help. For the heart testifies inwardly, and reflects the lack of something by the fear that strikes and wrestles within it. And because of this, it is confounded, since it is not able to abide in a state of surety; for God's help, it is said, is the help that saves. Ps. 59:12; 107:13

When a man knows that he is in need of divine help, he makes many prayers. And the more he multiplies them, his heart is humbled, for there is no man who will not be humbled when he is making supplication and entreaty. 'A heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise.' Therefore, as long as the heart is not humbled, it cannot cease from wandering; for humility collects the heart. Ps. 50:17

But when a man becomes humble, at once mercy encircles him, and then his heart is aware of divine help, because it finds a certain

power and assurance moving in itself. And when a man perceives the coming of divine help, and that it is this which aids him, then at once his heart is filled with faith, and he understands from this that prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those in darkness, a staff of the infirm, a shelter in time of temptations, a medicine at the height of sickness, a shield of deliverance in war, an arrow sharpened against the face of his enemies, and, to speak simply: the entire multitude of these good things is found to have its entrance through prayer.

From this time forward he revels in the prayer of faith, his heart glistens with clear assurance, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue. When he thus perceives these things, he will acquire prayer in his soul, like some treasure. And from his great gladness the form of prayer is turned into shouts of thanksgiving. This is the very thing pronounced by one who has defined the form proper to each of our actions: 'Prayer is joy that sends up thanksgiving.'[1] Here he speaks of the prayer that is achieved through the knowledge of God, that is, prayer that has been sent from God. For at that moment a man does not pray with labor and weariness (as in the rest of his prayer, which is prayed before the experiencing of this grace), and because his heart is full of joy and wonder, it continually wells up motions of confession and gratitude while he silently bows the knee. And from his vehement inner ardor, since he is very greatly moved by astonishment at this comprehension of God's graces, he suddenly raises his voice in praise and glorification of Him, and sends up thanksgiving; and he moves his tongue while being held with great awe.

If any man has reached this in truth and not in fancy, and has made many observations of this reality in himself, and has come to know its many differences by reason of his great experience, he knows what I say, for there is nothing here contrary to the truth. And from this time forward let him cease from pondering vanities, and let him remain with God by means of unbroken prayer, while being in anxiety and trepidation lest he be deprived of the magnitude of God's succor.

All these good things are born to a man from the recognition of his own weakness. For out of his craving for God's help, he presses on

1. St. Nilus of Sinai. *On Prayer,* §15. The Greek original has *Prayer is the fruit of joy and thanksgiving.*

toward God by the petitions of his prayer. And to the extent that he draws near to God in his intention, God also draws near to him through His gifts, and will not take His overshadowing away from him, on account of his great humility; for just like the widow before the judge, he cries out to be avenged of his adversary. [69] Luke 18:3

But for this very reason the compassionate God defers in granting a man's requests, even so that this may become a cause for him to draw near Him, and for his need's sake to stay close to Him Who is the brimming fount of succor. Some of his petitions God grants him promptly (I mean those without which no one can be saved), but some He withholds from him. And on certain occasions He restrains and dispels from him the scorching assault of the enemy, while on others, He permits him to be tempted, that this trial may become to him a cause for drawing near to God (as I said before), and also that he may be instructed, and have the experience of temptations. And such is the word of Scripture: 'The Lord left many nations, without driving them out; neither delivered He them into the hands of Jesus, the son of Navi, to chastise the sons of Israel by them, and that the tribes of the sons of Israel might be taught, and learn war.' Judg. 2:23 ff.

For the righteous man who has no consciousness of his own weakness walks on a razor's edge, and is never far from falling, nor from the ravening lion – I mean the demon of pride. And again, a man who does not know his own weakness falls short of humility; and he who falls short of this, also falls short of perfection; and he who falls short of perfection is forever held by dread, because his city is not founded on pillars of iron, neither upon lintels of brass, that is, humility. No man can acquire humility save by humility's own means, whereby the heart is made contrite and the deliberations of conceit are brought to nought.

This is why the enemy often finds in him a slight cause whereby he can deflect a man from the path. Without humility the work of man cannot be perfected, and the charter of his liberty does not yet bear the seal of the Spirit, but rather, until now he is a slave, and his work does not rise above fear. For a man cannot correct his work without humility, and he is not instructed except through temptations, and without wisdom he does not acquire humility.

Therefore the Lord looses upon the saints the causes of humility, of a contrite heart, and of ardent undistracted prayer, so that those who love Him might draw nigh to Him through humility. Often He

jolts them with the passions of their nature, and the intrusions of shameful and polluted thoughts; and often too by rebukes, insults, and the buffetings of men; but sometimes with diseases and bodily ailments; and at other times with poverty, and the utter lack of pressing necessities. And sometimes it is with the torment of excessive fear which He permits to fall upon them in the open warfare of the demons so as to trouble them strongly; but at times with dire variations,
[70] one more oppressive, grievous, and difficult than the next. All these things occur so that they may have causes to be humbled, and lest the slumber of negligence overtake them, either as regards those things from which the ascetic is wont to fall ill, or as regards the fear of things to come. Therefore temptations are necessarily profitable to men.

But I do not say this with the intent that a man should voluntarily allow himself to be made lax by shameful thoughts, that this may become to him a pretext of humility in his remembrance of them, nor do I mean that he should be assiduous to enter into further temptations, but rather that in cultivating good, he must be sober at all times, and watch over his soul, and reflect that he is a created being, and therefore very liable to sudden change. For every created being is in need of God's power for assistance, and by his need of another's assistance every man reveals his natural weakness. But the man who knows his own weakness must of necessity humble himself, so that his need may be supplied by Him Who has the power to give it. And if he had known it from the beginning, and had looked upon his weakness, he would not have grown negligent; and if he had not grown negligent, he would not have slumbered, and been given over to the hands of those who afflict him in order to wake him up.

Therefore, whoever walks the path of God must give thanks to Him for all the things that come upon him, and revile and blame his own soul, and know that he would not have been delivered over by his Provider except because of some negligence, in order that his mind might be awakened, or else because he has become puffed up. But he should not be troubled on this account, nor quit the arena and the fight, nor leave himself free of self-reproach, lest his evil grow twofold. For with God, Who abundantly pours forth righteousness, there is no injustice. Far be it! Unto Him be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 9

On sins voluntary and involuntary, and on those which are committed because of some accidental circumstance

THERE ARE SINS that a man commits from weakness, being drawn into them against his will; and there are sins that a man commits voluntarily; and there are some that are from ignorance. Also, it happens that a man will sin owing to an accidental circumstance, or again, because of his long continuance in evil, or from habit. Although all these modes and kinds of sins are blameworthy, yet with respect to the punishment to be exacted for each, one is found to be comparatively greater than the other.

The blame of one sin is very great and its repentance is only accepted with difficulty, but another is more easily forgiven. Just as Adam, Eve, and the serpent all received from God the recompense of their sin, yet the curse which each one received differed greatly, so also with the sons of Adam and Eve – the severity of the punishment for a sin accords with a man's intention and his desire of sin. If a man does not wish to follow the way of sin, but notwithstanding, he is drawn toward it on account of his negligence regarding virtue (since he does not practise it), even though it is grievous to him to be joined with sin, then his punishment will be severe. But if someone who is diligent in virtue should be tempted in some sin, then mercy is undoubtedly near him to cleanse him.

It is one thing when a man is carefully diligent in virtue, constant in its works, and passes the night meditating upon it, lest he fall short in any of its duties. But although he should carry his burden around with him by day and all his care is for virtue, still while he is engaged in such concerns, the scale of his balance sinks a little to the left and he is drawn down by the weakness of the flesh into one of the forms of sin, either by reason of a certain ignorance, or because of things that oppose him on his path (that is, the path of virtue) and the billows that rise up in his members at every hour, or because of the

aberration[1] that is allowed to remain in him so that his free will might be tried. This causes him grief and anguish and, because of the misery that contrary things inflict upon him, he sighs painfully over his soul.

But it is a very different thing when a man is found to be lax and heedless in the work of virtue, when he has utterly abandoned the path and runs slavishly to be subservient to every pleasure of sin, showing his zeal to invent means whereby he might enjoy it perfectly, and being ready like a slave assiduously to do the will of his enemy, and to make his members weapons for the devil in complete obedience to him; he wishes not at all to give heed to repentance, neither to draw nigh to virtue, nor to cut off and put an end to the path of his destruction.

Something else again are the slips and the falls which can occur on the path of virtue and the way of righteousness, as the Fathers write, saying that on the path of virtue and the way of righteousness there are falls, oppositions, compulsions, and the like.

But something quite different is the death of the soul, complete destruction and utter abandonment. By this it is evident that whenever a man falls, he should not forget the love of his Father. And if it happens that he fall into manifold transgressions, he should not be negligent concerning the good, nor should he stop his onward course, but even though he was vanquished, he should rise up again to struggle against his adversaries and each day begin to lay a foundation for his ruined dwelling, having the words of the Prophet in his mouth until his departure from this world, 'Rejoice not against me, mine enemy, that I have fallen; for I will rise again; for though I should sit in dark-
Mic. 7:8 ness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.'

May he never cease from making war until his death, and as long as there is breath in his nostrils may he not surrender his soul to defeat, even at the very moment of his defeat! But if each day his ship be broken up and his cargo perish in the deep, let him not cease from acquiring new possessions, trading, and also from borrowing; let him set out in other ships, sailing in hope, until the Lord, beholding his struggle and taking compassion on his ruin, sends down upon him His mercy and gives him powerful motivations to enable him to

1. I.e. the propensity toward aberration or going astray.

undergo and resist the flaming darts of the enemy. This is the wisdom which is granted by God, and this is the wise invalid who has not cut off his hope. It were better for us to be condemned on account of particular deeds than on account of our abandoning all. [73]

For this reason Abba Martinian admonished us not to grow weary in the face of the many struggles and the diverse kinds of warfare that are met continually on the path of righteousness, and not to turn back so as to give the enemy victory over us in some shameful manner. As a loving father he enjoins these things in an orderly fashion, point by point.

The Admonition of Saint Martinian. My children, if you are truly strugglers, men who pay heed to virtue and care for your souls, and you earnestly desire your mind to be limpidly pure before Christ and to do that which is pleasing to Him, then it surely behooves you to accept for His sake every warfare kindled by our nature's passions, the attractions of this world, the duration and persistence of the demons' wickedness with which they are accustomed to confront you, and all their snares. Do not grow faint-hearted because of the continuing and obdurate fierceness of the battle; do not become hesitant because of the long duration of your struggle; do not grow lax, neither be afraid of the hosts of your enemies; and if for a season you should perhaps stumble and sin, do not fall into the pit of despair. But if something should befall you in this great war and you should even be wounded upon your face, let this in no wise hinder you from attaining your goal. Rather, persevere in the pursuit that you have chosen, and you will achieve that thing most desirable and praiseworthy, to prove steadfast and unmoving in war, reddened by the blood of your wounds. Never cease, therefore, from wrestling with your adversaries.

Such are the admonitions of the great elder. Hence, because of what we have said, you should not grow weak or lax. But woe to that monk who has proved false to his vow, who, trampling upon his conscience, stretches forth his hand to the devil to enable the latter to exult over him because of one of the small or great modes of sin, and who can no longer withstand his enemies since one part of his soul has been devastated! With what countenance will he look on, when his companions who have attained purity will greet one another? For he has parted ways with them and walked the path of perdition; he

has lost the boldness before God that the righteous possess, and the prayer that ascends from a pure heart, which is borne up above the angelic hosts and is not arrested until it has obtained its request and returned with joy to the mouth that sent it forth. But what is more terrible, just as he has separated his path from theirs, so Christ will separate him from them in that day when the shining cloud will bear upon its back their bodies made resplendent by purity and carry them through the gates of Heaven. For this reason 'the ungodly shall not stand up in judgment,' since their works have been judged here already, 'nor sinners in the council of the righteous,' in the resurrection of judgment.

Ps. 1:5

John 5:29

Homily 10

On the words of the divine writings which urge men to repentance, and that they were said with a view to men's weakness, lest they perish from the living God, but that one must not employ them as an excuse for sinning

THE ENCOURAGEMENT that the Fathers give in their divine writings, and the help for repentance that is found in the writings of the apostles and the prophets, must not be employed by us as an aid for sinning, and for breaking the Lord's inviolable decrees, which by the power of God were decreed from ancient times, through the mouth of all the saints in all their writings and legislations, in order to abolish sin. The fact that repentance furnishes hope should not be taken by us as a means to rob ourselves of the feeling of fear, so that one might more freely and fearlessly commit sin. For behold how God in every wise preached fear in all the Scriptures and showed Himself to be a hater of sin.

Why indeed was the generation of men in the days of Noah drowned in the deluge? Was it not because of their lasciviousness when they raved over the beauty of the daughters of Cain? At that time there was no avarice, no idolatry, no sorcery, no wars. Gen. 6:2 ff.

Why were the cities of the Sodomites consumed by fire? Was it not because they gave their members over to lust and impurity, such that it dominated over all of them in every abominable and unnatural act, even as they willed? Was it not because of the fornication of one man that in one instant five and twenty thousand of the sons of Israel, the first-born of God, fell and died? Gen. 18:20 ff. Num. 25:6–9

Why was the mighty man Samson rejected by God, he who was set apart and consecrated to God while still in the womb; whose birth was announced by an angel, like John, the son of Zacharias; who was granted great power and worked great wonders, and by the supernatural strength which God poured into his body smote a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass and became a saviour and judge unto

Israel? Was it not because he defiled his holy members by union with a harlot? For this reason God departed from him and surrendered
Judg. 16:4 ff. him to his enemies.

And David, who was a man after God's own heart, who because of his virtues was found worthy to generate from his seed the promise of the Fathers, and to have Christ shine forth from himself for the salvation of all the world, was he not punished because of adultery with a woman, when he beheld her beauty with his eyes and was pierced in his soul by that arrow? For it was because of this that God raised up a war against him from within his own household, and he who came forth from his loins pursued him. These things befell him even after he had repented with many tears, such that he moistened his couch with his weeping, and after God had said to him through
2 Kgs. 12:13 the prophet, 'The Lord hath forgiven thy sin.'

I wish also to bring to mind certain men before David. For what reason did wrath and death come upon the house of the priest Eli, the righteous elder who was eminent for forty years in his priesthood? Was it not because of the iniquity of his sons Ophni and Phineas? For neither did he sin, nor did they with his assent, but it was because he did not have the zeal to demand from them the Lord's vindication[1] and he loved them more than the statutes of the Lord. Lest any surmise that the Lord manifests His wrath only upon those who pass all the days of their life in iniquities, behold how for this unseemly sin He manifests His zeal against His genuine servants, against priests, judges, rulers, men consecrated to Him, to whom He entrusted the working of miracles, and how He in no wise overlooks their transgression of His statutes, as it is written in Ezekiel, 'I said to the man whom I commanded to go into Jerusalem with an invisible sword: Begin at My sanctuary, and have no mercy upon the old man and the
Ezek. 9:5, 6 youth.'

Thus He showed that His true servants and friends are those who walk before Him in fear and reverence and do His will, since virtuous deeds and purity of conscience are things holy and beloved of God. But when men repudiate His paths, the Lord repudiates them, casts
[76] them away from His face, and takes His grace away from them. For why was the sentence against Baltasar issued so swiftly and why did

1. I.e. to punish them. *Vide* 1 Kgs. 3:13.

it strike him down as it were in the form of a hand? Was it not because he acted with audacity toward the untouchable vessels of offering which he seized from Jerusalem, drinking out of them, both he and his concubines? In the same manner, those who have consecrated their members to God, but are so audacious as to use them once more for worldly deeds, the same perish, being smitten by an invisible blow. Dan. 5:1 ff.

Therefore, let us not disregard the oracles and threats of God by reason of our confidence in repentance and the good courage given us by the divine Writings, and so anger Him by our wicked deeds and defile our members that have been consecrated once and for all to the service of God. For lo, we have consecrated ourselves to Him, as Elias, Elisseus, the sons of the prophets, and all the other saints and virgins, who worked great wonders and spoke with God face to face. And further, as all those who came after them: John the Virgin, Saint Peter, and the other heralds and preachers of the New Testament, who consecrated themselves to the Lord, from Whom they received the knowledge of mysteries – some from His very mouth, others through revelation – and who became intercessors between God and men and receptacles of His revelations, and preachers of the Kingdom to the whole world.

Homily 11

On how the beauty of monastic life is preserved and on how it can be a means for God to be glorified

THE MONK OUGHT TO BE in his appearance and all his actions an exemplar of profit to those who see him, so that by reason of his many virtues which shine forth like sunbeams, the enemies of truth, when they look upon him, will involuntarily confess that the hope of salvation which the Christians have is firm and unshakeable, and from every side will run to him as a refuge. And so the horn of the Church will be exalted over her enemies, and many will be moved to emulation of his virtue, and will come forth from the world; and he will be venerable among all because of the beauty of his life, so that on his account the mouth of the sons of the Church will be opened and their head will be exalted above all religions. For the boast of the Church of Christ is the monastic way of life.

In every aspect, therefore, the beauties of a monk's life should shine forth, namely: in elevation above the visible world; scrupulous non-possessiveness; perfect contempt of the flesh; sublime fasting; constancy in silence; orderly discipline of the senses; careful watch over the sight; the cutting off of all contention with any man over anything pertaining to this age; brevity in speech; purity from the remembrance of wrongs; simplicity with discernment; sincerity and ingenuousness of the heart coupled with sound judgment, alertness, and acumen.

And further, the following is proper to him: to know that the present life is unavailing and fleeting, and that the true and spiritual life is near at hand; not to be known or observed by men; not to fetter himself with companionship and union with any man; to have a quiet dwelling-place, a cramped abode, paltry and mean possessions; to flee men always like a wild ass, and unflaggingly to persevere in prayers and readings; not to love honor, nor to rejoice in guests; not

to bind himself with this life; courageously to endure temptations; to divorce himself from worldly rumors and from inquiries into worldly affairs; continually to take thought for and to keep in mind his true country; to have a sad and furrowed countenance; to weep without pause day and night; and more than all these, in things both small and great to keep guard over his chastity and to cleanse himself from gluttony. For these are a monk's manifest beauties stated in brief, and they bear witness to his dying utterly to the world and his nearness to God.

We ought at all times, therefore, to give thought to these virtues and acquire them for ourselves. But if someone should ask what need I have to state these things separately and not speak about them generally and in brief, I answer that it is done of necessity, in order that when a man who takes care for his life looks for one of the aforesaid things in his soul to find whether he is lacking in one of them, he may learn his deficiency in each virtue from these distinctions, and this list will serve as a reminder to him. And should he acquire in himself all the virtues stated, then knowledge of others also, which I have not mentioned, will be granted to him. And he will be, for men and the holy angels, a cause for ascribing glory to God. Thus from here, before he departs from this life, he will prepare for his soul a place of repose. To our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 12

That the servant of God who has stripped himself of the things of the world, and is come forth in quest of Him, must never, because he has not attained to a sure apprehension of the truth, cease from his quest for fear of this, and grow cold in that ardor which is born of love for things divine and of searching out their mysteries; and on how the mind is confounded by the memory of the passions

THE STAGES through which man advances are three: the beginner's stage, the intermediate, and that of the perfect. In the first stage all a man's thinking and recollection is held within the passions, even if his mind is directed toward good. The second is a kind of midway laid between passion and dispassion: both thoughts from the right hand and those from the left move equally within him, and light and darkness never cease from welling forth, as has already been said. But if he should desist for a little from continuous reading of spiritual writings and from the forming of vivid conceptions of divine subjects (which, when he muses upon them, set him aflame by their modes of truth according to his capacity), and should he cease as well from his outward watchfulness (from which come both inner watchfulness and proficient work), then he is certain to be swept away into the passions.

He should, therefore, feed his natural ardor in ways I have said, and should not leave his quest and search and yearning after those things which are afar off, even though he has never seen them, but only the indications of them found in his reading of the divine Scriptures. By these things he should nourish his thoughts, holding them close lest they incline to the left. He should be careful not to accept some devilish seed of phantasy in the guise of truth, and should ardently watch over his soul. Then, if he does these things, and if he asks God with arduous prayer and patience, He will grant him his petition and open His door to him, but chiefly for his humility's sake. For 'mysteries are revealed to the humble.'

Ecclus. 3:19

But if he dies in this hope, even if he has nowhere seen that land from close at hand, nevertheless it seems to me that his inheritance will be with those righteous men of old, who hoped to reach perfection even though they never saw it, as the Apostolic utterance says, 'For they labored in hope all their days, and they slept.' Otherwise, Heb. 11:13 what should we say if such a man were not to gain entry to the land of promise, which is the stage of perfection, that is, lucid comprehension of the truth according to the measure of his natural capacity? Is he then barred from it on that account, and does he remain in the lowest stage, where the entire disposition is inclined toward things of the left? Or because he has not apprehended the whole truth, shall he then continue in the ignobleness of the lowest stage, which has no cognizance of, nor any desire for, these things? Or is it fitting that he should be raised to that middle stage which I have mentioned?

For even though he has never beheld it, not even 'through a mirror,' still he hoped from afar, and through this hope was added to his 1 Cor. 13:12 Fathers. And although he was not deemed worthy of perfect grace while here, nevertheless, because he was always conversant with it, and with all his understanding he always absorbed himself in it, and because his desire was fixed upon it as long as he was alive, he was able to cut off evil thoughts. And so, his heart being filled with God, he departed from life with this hope.

Anything whatsoever possessing humility is of its nature comely. For the incorporeal meditation of the understanding on the love of God (which meditation is guided by the understanding of the divine Scriptures) screens the soul from within against evil thoughts. And further it holds the mind in the remembrance of good things to come, lest the mind in its idleness should be diffused amid recollections of worldly things, and by these the fervor of its movements should be chilled, and it should fall into desires. But to our God be glory. Amen.

Homily 13

On the alteration and change that takes place in those who are making their way on the path of stillness, which has been laid out by God; for sometimes melancholy and suffocation of soul occur, sometimes sudden joy and unaccustomed fervor. Glory be to Him Who orders our paths aright! Amen

ONCE A MAN has made up his mind to live his life in stillness, let him set himself in order and pass the rest of his days in the cultivation and regular practice of stillness. Whenever it happens to you (as is usual in the regular practice of stillness which is determined by divine grace) that your soul is enshrouded by thick darkness from within and, as with the sun's rays when they are hidden from the earth by the mist of clouds, for a brief time she is deprived of spiritual comfort and the light of grace on account of the cloud of passions that overshadows her; and further, that the joy-producing power in your soul is curtailed for a little, and your mind is overshadowed by an unwonted mist: then do not be troubled in mind, do not lend a hand to despondency.[1] But be patient, be engaged in reading the books of the Doctors of the Church, compel yourself in prayer, and expect to receive help. Then straightway help will come unawares.

For just as by the rays of the sun the face of the earth is unveiled from the darkness of the atmosphere that enshrouds it, even so is prayer able to dissolve and scatter the clouds of passions from our soul, and make our mind transparent to the light of gladness and comfort which, indeed, it customarily produces in our thoughts, but especially when it possesses material of succor from the divine Scriptures and vigilance, which make the mind to shine. For continual study in the writings of the saints fills the soul with incomprehensible wonder and divine gladness. To our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

1. Or *faint-heartedness* [lit. *littleness of soul*]. This is the Syriac reading. Gk. *ignorance of soul.*

Homily 14

Concerning hesychasts: on when they begin to understand what place they have attained with their labors in the boundless sea that is the life of stillness; and on when they can have a little hope that their toils have begun to yield them fruit

I SHALL TELL YOU SOMETHING, and do not laugh, for I speak the truth; neither doubt my words, for they who have handed them down to me are true. Though you should suspend yourself by your eyelids before God, do not think you have attained to anything by the manner of life which you lead until you have attained to tears. For until then, your hidden self is in the service of the world; that is, you are leading the life of those who dwell in the world, and do the work of God with the outward man. But the inward man is still without fruit, for his fruit begins with tears.

When you attain to the region of tears, then know that your mind has left the prison of this world and has set its foot on the journey to the new age, and has begun to breathe that other air, new and wonderful. And at the same moment it begins to shed tears, since the birth pangs of the spiritual infant are at hand. For grace, the common mother of all, makes haste mystically to give birth in the soul to the divine image for the light of the age to come. But when the time of its delivery is arrived, simultaneously the mind begins to be stirred by something of that other age, just like the subtle breath the babe draws inside the body wherein it is nurtured. And since the mind cannot bear what is not usual for it, it suddenly begins to set the body to wail, a wailing mingled with the sweetness of honey. And as much as the inward babe is raised, by just so much is there an increase in tears. But this order of tears, the one of which I have been speaking, is not the one that also at intervals comes over hesychasts. Because this consolation, which appears from time to time, is every man's who dwells in stillness with God. Sometimes it comes to him when he finds himself in the divine vision of his mind, and sometimes through the words of

the Scriptures, and sometimes in the converse of prayer. But I am speaking rather of that order which belongs to him who sheds tears unceasingly both night and day.

Whoever has found the reality of these things truly and accurately, has found it in stillness. The eyes of such a man become like fountains of water for two years' time or even more, that is, during the time of transition: I mean, of mystical transition. But afterwards he enters into peace of thought; and from this peace of thought he enters into
Heb. 4:3 that rest of which Saint Paul has spoken, only in part, however, and to the extent that nature can contain it. From that place of peace, his mind begins to behold mysteries. And thereupon the Holy Spirit begins to reveal heavenly things to him, and God dwells within him, and raises up the fruit of the Spirit in him. And from this he per-
1 Cor. 13:12 ceives, somewhat dimly and in a figure, as it were, the change nature is going to receive at the renewal of all things.

These things I have written down as a reminder and source of profit for myself, and for every man who comes upon this book, according to what I have understood from both the divine vision of the Scriptures and from true mouths, and a little from experience itself, in order that they might be a help to me through the prayers of those who are profited by them. For I have taken no little trouble to set these things down.

But again, hear also what I am about to tell you; it is something I learned from a mouth that does not lie. When you enter into that region which is peace of the thoughts, then the multitude of tears is taken away from you, and afterwards tears come to you in due measure and at the appropriate time. This is, in all exactness, the truth of the matter as told in brief, and it is believed by the whole Church and by her eminent men and front-line warriors.

Homily 15

On guarding and keeping oneself from lax and negligent men, and on how, by drawing near to them, heedlessness and laxity rule over a man and he is filled with every passion. And on guarding oneself from proximity to youths, lest the mind be defiled by licentious thoughts

He who restrains his mouth from speech guards his heart from the passions. The man who cleanses his heart from the passions beholds the Lord at every moment; and he whose meditation is always upon God drives away the demons from himself and uproots the seed of their wickedness. The heart of the man who oversees his soul at all times is made joyous by revelations. He who gathers within himself the vision of his understanding beholds therein the Radiance of the Father. The man who despises every distraction beholds his Master within his heart. If you love purity, in which the Master of all can be seen, do not speak disparagingly of any man or listen to another who maligns his brother. If some quarrel in your presence and you hear words of wrath, close your ears and flee from that place, lest your soul perish from life. A wrathful heart is entirely devoid of the mysteries of God, but the meek and humble man is a well-spring of the mysteries of the new age.

Lo, Heaven is within you (if indeed you are pure), and within it you will see both the angels in their light and their Master with them and in them. The man who is justly praised is not harmed thereby; but if praise seems sweet to him, he labors without recompense. The treasure of the humble is within him, and this is the Lord. He who guards his tongue will never be plundered by it unto the ages. A silent mouth interprets God's mysteries, but the garrulous man is distant from his Creator. The good man's soul shines more brightly than the sun and is gladdened at every moment by the *theoria* of divine mysteries. He who follows a lover of God will be enriched by God's mysteries, but he who follows an unrighteous and proud man will be

estranged from God and abhorred by His friends. The man whose tongue is inclined to silence will acquire a humble discipline in all his habits and will thus gain control over his passions without toil. The passions are uprooted and driven away by unceasing study of God and this is the sword that slays them. Just as the dolphin stirs and swims about when the visible sea is still and calm, so also, when the sea of the heart is tranquil and still from wrath and anger, mysteries and divine revelations are stirred in her at all times to delight her.

He who wishes to see the Lord within himself devises means to cleanse his heart by continuous remembrance of God, and thus through the clearness of the eyes of his mind he will behold the Lord at all times. That which befalls a fish out of water, befalls the mind that has come out of the remembrance of God and wanders in the remembrance of the world. The more a man withdraws from the converse of men, the more he is deemed worthy of boldness before God in his understanding. And the more he denies himself the comforts of this world, the more he becomes worthy of the joy of God in the Holy Spirit. Even as fish perish from lack of water, so the noetic movements that God causes to blossom forth vanish from the heart of the monk who loves to dwell and pass his life in company with worldly men.

A man of the world who endures tribulation in worldly affairs and hardship in this life is superior to the monk who suffers hardships and dwells with worldly men. Dreadful to the demons and greatly beloved of God and His angels is the man who both day and night seeks God in his heart and with ardent zeal uproots from his heart the assaults[1] sown by the enemy. The country of the man who is pure in soul is within him; the sun that shines within him is the light of the Holy Trinity; the air that the denizens of this realm breathe is the comforting and All-holy Spirit; and those who make their abode with him are the holy and incorporeal natures.[2] Christ, the Light of the Father's light, is their life, joy, and happiness. Such a man is gladdened at all times by the divine vision of his soul, and he is enthralled by his own beauty which is truly a hundredfold more resplendent than the brilliance of the sun itself. This is Jerusalem and the Kingdom of God which is hidden within us, as the Lord says. This realm

Luke 17:21

1. Syriac *seeds*.

2. I.e. the angels.

is a cloud of God's glory, into which only the pure of heart may enter to behold the countenance of their Master and to have their minds illumined by the ray of His light. Matt. 5:8 [86]

But the angry and wrathful man, the vainglorious, the avaricious, the glutton, and he who mixes with worldly men, he who wishes to have his own way, the irascible, and he who is filled with every passion, these are like men who wage war in the night; they grope in the dark because they are outside the realm of life and light, for that realm has been allotted to the godly, the humble, and to those who have purified their hearts. A man cannot behold the beauty that lies within himself until he dishonors and detests every beautiful thing that is outside of him, and he cannot genuinely set his gaze upon God until he has utterly renounced the world. He who reviles and belittles himself will be made wise by the Lord, but he who considers himself wise will fall away from divine wisdom. The more a man's tongue flees talkativeness, the more his understanding is illuminated to be able to discern deep thoughts; for the rational mind is bemuddled by talkativeness.

The man who becomes destitute of the things of this world will be rich in God, and the friend of rich men will become destitute of God. I believe that if a man is sober in mind, humble, abhors boldness, and expels anger from his heart, he certainly sees the light of the Holy Spirit in his soul whenever he stands up in prayer, and he exults in the illuminations of His light's resplendence, and is made joyous by the divine vision of His glory and by the soul's change according to His likeness. There is no other activity that can so disperse the onslaught of the unclean demons as divine vision in God.

A certain father related to me the following: 'One day as I was sitting, my mind was taken captive in divine vision, and when I came to myself, I sighed heavily. But when the demon who was standing opposite me heard this he was terrified; and consumed as it were by lightning, and compelled to wail aloud, he took to flight as though he were pursued by someone.'

Blessed is the man who remembers his departure from this life and severs his ties with this world's delights, for many times over he will receive blessedness at his departure and this blessedness will not fail him. This is the man who is born of God and whose Nurse is the Holy

Spirit; he suckles the life-giving nourishment from the Spirit's breast and delights in the odor of His fragrance. But the man who is enchained by worldly affairs, and by the world, and by its consolations, and who loves its intercourse, is bereft of life and I know not what to say of him, except to weep with inconsolable cries of lamentation, the sound of which breaks the hearts of those who hear it.

You that are in darkness, raise up your heads that your countenances may shine in the light. Come forth from the passions of the world, so that the Light that originates from the Father may come forth to meet you and command the ministers of His mysteries to loose you from your bonds, that you may walk in His footsteps toward the Father. Alas, how we are bound, and from Whom we are [87] cut off, that we should not behold His glory! Would that our bonds were severed so that we might search for and find our God!

If you wish to understand the mysteries within men but you have not yet come to learn this from the Spirit, then from each man's words, manner of life, and discipline you may learn it, if only you are wise. He who is pure of soul and chaste in life always speaks the words of the Spirit discreetly, and in accord with his own measure he speaks of the things of God and of the things that are within him. But when a man's heart is crushed by the passions, his tongue is moved by them; and even though he speak of spiritual matters, yet he discourses passionately, to the end that he might be victorious by unjust means. The wise man will mark such a man at his first encounter with him, and the pure man will smell his evil stench.

The man who is found continually in idle speech and distraction of soul and body is a fornicator; he who approves of such a man and keeps his company is an adulterer; and he who intimately communes with him is an idolater. Special affection for youths is abominable fornication before God and there is no plaster that can heal such a man's fall; but the man who loves all men equally and indiscriminately with compassion has attained to perfection. The young man who follows after a youth causes discerning men to weep and lament over the two; but an old man who follows after youths has a passion more foul-smelling than the former, and even though he should converse with them about virtue, his heart is grievously injured. A young man who is humble of thought and silent, whose heart is pure of envy and anger, who withdraws from every man and pays heed to himself, will

quickly comprehend the passions of a negligent elder. In no wise hold company with an elder who is not equally disposed to an old man and to a youth, but with all your strength avoid his company, nay rather, flee from him.

Woe to the heedless who feign purity in order to nourish their passions! But the man who has reached old age abiding in purity of thoughts, in disciplined life, and the holding of his tongue, in this life takes delight in the sweetness of the fruit of knowledge, and at his departure from his body he receives God's glory.

Nothing so cools the fire that the Holy Spirit breathes into a monk's heart for the sanctification of his soul, as familiar intercourse, much speaking, and association, except it be with the initiates of God's mysteries for the nurturing and amplification of his knowledge; for such intercourse as this awakens the soul to life, uproots the passions and, more than all the virtues, makes shameful thoughts vanish. Have none but such men for your friends and the sharers of your secrets, lest you place a stumbling-block for your soul and stray from the way of the Lord.

Magnify in your heart the love that unites and joins you to God,[3] lest the love of the world take you captive, for this is the beginning [88] and end of corruption. Habitation and familiar intercourse with ascetics is a cause for each to be enriched with divine mysteries; but affection for slothful and indolent men leads to insatiable filling of the belly in banqueting with one another. It is an odious thing for such a man to partake of food without his companion, and he says, 'Woe to the man who eats his bread alone!' for it will not seem sweet to him. These invite one another to banquets and like hirelings repay each other's courtesies. Away with this accursed love, this unseemly and obscene conduct! Flee, O my brother, from those who have become accustomed to do such things, and never desire to eat with them, even if necessity should constrain you. For their table is accursed and is waited upon by the demons. The friends of Christ the Bridegroom do not partake of it.

The monk who is ever preparing banquets is a laborer for the demon of lust, and he defiles the soul of the humble man. The frugal bread of a chaste man's table makes the soul of him who eats it chaste

3. Some Syriac MSS have the variant *the love for him who unites you to God*. The context makes this seem very likely to be the meaning of the passage.

of every passion. The smell of a glutton's table is the abundance of dishes and fried foods; the foolish and senseless will be drawn to it like a dog to the butcher's shop. But the table of a man who continually perseveres in prayer is sweeter than the scent of musk and the fragrance of perfumes, and the lover of God yearns for this as for a priceless treasure.

Take for yourself the remedy of life from the table of those who fast, keep vigil, and labor in the Lord, and so raise up the dead man in your soul. For the Beloved reclines in their midst, bestowing sanctification, and He transforms the bitterness of their hardship into His ineffable sweetness. His spiritual and heavenly ministers overshadow both them and their holy foods. I know one of the brethren who has seen this with his own eyes.

Blessed is the man who makes himself deaf to every pleasure that separates him from his Creator, for he eats only one delectable food from the table of the Most High, even that by which the powers of Heaven are nourished. Blessed is he who has as nourishment the Bread which came down from Heaven and gave life to the world, for the ages of the new world are sustained thereby. Blessed is the man who in his drink beholds the irrigating Watercourse of life that mercifully pours forth from the Father's bosom. For when he drinks thereof his eye is fixed on Him and his heart will be made glad, blossom anew, and be filled with joy and exultation. The man who has seen his Lord in his nourishment steals away and partakes of it alone, sharing nothing with the unworthy, lest it be partaken of by them and be stripped of His beam of glory. But he whose food is mingled with the poison of death cannot partake of it gladly without the company of his companions. The man who has friends in order to satisfy his
[89] belly is a wolf devouring corpses. How great is your insatiability, O fool, for you wish to fill your belly at the table of the heedless, whereby your soul is filled with every passion! These admonitions will be sufficient for those who are able to rule over their bellies.

The odor of a faster is most fragrant, and upon meeting him the hearts of discerning men are made joyous; but the glutton is stricken with fear when he associates with the faster and devises excuses not to eat with him.

An abstinent man's way of life is dearly beloved of God, but his

proximity is most oppressive to the greedy. Christ exceedingly praises the silent man, but his presence will not seem sweet to those whom the demons take captive through amusements and distractions. Who does not love a humble and meek man? Only proud men and slanderers, who are foreign to his work.

A Narration of a Certain Holy Man. Someone related the following to me from his own experience: 'On days that I keep company with men I eat three or four small loaves of dried bread, and when I compel myself to pray, my mind possesses no boldness before God and I cannot set my gaze upon Him. When, however, I separate myself from them by practising stillness, the first day with difficulty I eat only one loaf and a half, and on the second day, one. But once my mind is anchored in stillness, I struggle to eat one loaf and yet I cannot. Without effort my mind ceaselessly converses boldly with God, and His radiance constantly illumines me and induces me to behold and take delight in the beauty of His divine light. But if, while I am practising stillness, someone comes and converses with me, be it for an hour only, then it is impossible for me not to increase my meal, not to fall short of my rule, and for my mind not to grow slack in the divine vision of that light.'

Behold, my brethren, how good and profitable are patience and solitude, and what power and facility they give to ascetics. Blessed is he who is patient in stillness for the sake of God and eats his bread alone, since he converses with God always, to Whom be glory and dominion both now and ever and unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 16

On renouncing the world and refraining from familiarity with men

WHEN WE WISH TO FLEE from the world and become strangers to worldly affairs, there is nothing that so separates us from the world, or so mortifies the passions in us and rouses and brings us to life in spiritual things, as do mourning and the pain of heart that is joined with discernment. The face of a modest and reverent man imitates the humility of the Beloved. And again, there is nothing that makes us associate with the world and those in the world, and even those given over to drunkenness and prodigality, and nothing that separates us from the treasures of wisdom and the knowledge of God's mysteries, so much as facetiousness and wanton frivolity. This, too, is the business of the demon of fornication.

But since I have made proof of your love of wisdom, beloved, it is with love that I entreat you: be on your guard against the spiteful abuse of the enemy, lest by the trumpery of his words he chill your soul from the fervor of Christ's love, Who for your sake tasted gall on the Tree of the Cross, and lest, instead of that sweet study and boldness before God, he fill your soul with many imaginings even while you are awake and, asleep, he make her captive to unseemly dreams, the stench of which the holy angels of God cannot endure. Thus to others you will be the cause of slips and falls, and to yourself, a stake of impalement. Force yourself, then, to imitate the humility of Christ, so that the fire which He sent down upon you may blaze up all the more; by this fire all stirrings of the world, which slay the new man and defile the courts of the Lord, the Holy and Mighty, are torn up by the roots.

For I make bold to say, along with Saint Paul, 'We are the temple
1 Cor. 3:16 of God.' Let us then purify His temple, as He is pure, that He may wish to settle in it. Let us hallow it, as He is holy. And let us adorn it

with all good and honorable works. Let us cense it with the frankincense that gives rest to His will, with the pure and heart-felt prayer that is impossible to acquire by association with constant worldly activities, and thus the cloud of His glory will overshadow our souls, and the light of His majesty will dawn within our hearts; and all those who dwell in the tabernacle of God will be filled with joy and gladness, but the unabashed and shameless will vanish in the flame of the Holy Spirit.

So continually upbraid yourself, O brother, and say: Woe to you, wretched soul, your separation from the body is at hand. Why do you rejoice in what today you will leave behind, the very sight of which you will be deprived of forever? Take heed to what lies before you, stop and consider what things you have done, in what way, and what sort of things they are, and with whom you have passed the days of your life, or who has accepted the toil of your husbandry, and whom you have gladdened with your wrestling, that he will come forth to meet you at the time of your departure. But whom did you gladden and gratify during your course, that you might find rest in his haven? And for whose sake did you endure hardships as you toiled, that you might reach him with joy? And whom will you have as a friend in the age to come, that he might now welcome you in the moment of your departure? In which field did you hire yourself out, and who will pay you your wages at the sunset of your separation?

Examine yourself, O soul, and see in what land your portion lies; and if you have crossed over to that field which bears a harvest of bitterness for those who till it, wail and cry aloud, with groaning and great affliction, those words which give rest to your God more than sacrifices and whole-burnt offerings. Let your mouth pour forth anguished laments, at which the holy angels are made glad. Drench your cheeks with the weeping of your eyes, that the Holy Spirit may rest upon you, and wash you from the filth of your wickedness. Appease your Lord with tears, that He may come to your aid. Appeal to Mary and Martha to teach you mournful cries. Call out to the Lord:

A Prayer O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, Thou that didst weep over Lazarus, and shed tears of sorrow and compassion for him, accept the tears of my bitterness.

By Thy Passion, cure my passions.

By Thy Wounds, heal my wounds.

By Thy Blood, purge my blood; mingle the fragrance of Thy life-creating Body with my body.

Let the gall Thou didst drink at enemies' hands sweeten my soul from the bitterness which the foe hath given me to drink.

Let Thy Body, O Friend of man, which was stretched on the Tree of the Cross, extend toward Thee mine understanding which is
[92] dragged evilly downward by demons.

Let Thy Head, which Thou didst bow on the Cross, raise up my head, which is buffeted by mine adversaries.

Let Thine all-holy Hands, which were nailed to the Cross by the unbelieving Jews, lead me out of the abyss of perdition to Thee, as Thine all-holy Mouth hath promised.

Let Thy Countenance, which received blows and spittings from accursed men, brighten my countenance, which is stained with iniquities.

Let Thy Soul, which on the Cross Thou didst commend to Thy Father, guide me to Thee by Thy grace.

I have not a mournful heart wherewith to seek Thee, I have no repentance, I have no compunction, which brings the children into their proper inheritance. O Master, I have not a comforting tear.

My mind is darkened by the affairs of this life, and hath no strength to look steadfastly toward Thee with groaning. My heart is grown cold from the multitude of temptations, and cannot warm herself with tears of love for Thee.

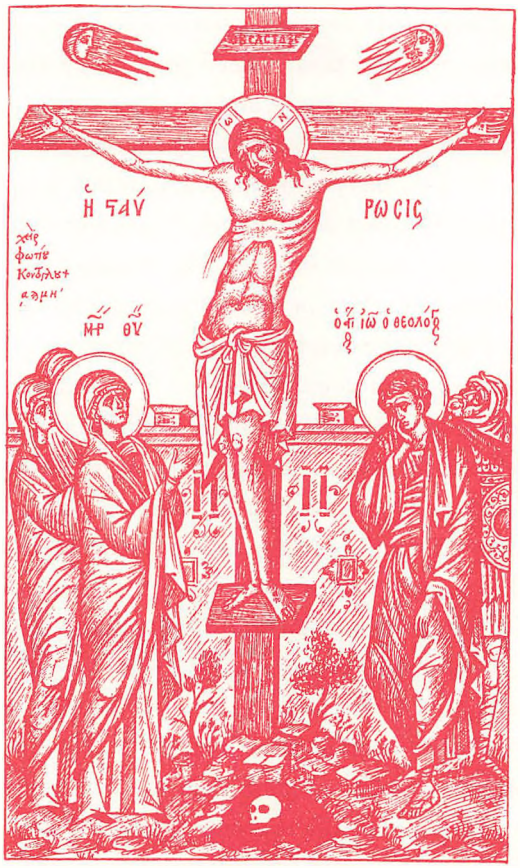
But Thou, my Lord and God Jesus Christ, the Treasury of good gifts, grant me thorough repentance and a sorrowing heart, that with all my soul I may go forth to seek Thee. For without Thee, I am a stranger to all that is good.

Therefore, O Good One, freely grant me Thy grace. Let the Father, Who hath timelessly and everlastingly brought Thee forth from His bosom, renew in me the features of Thine image.

I have forsaken Thee, do not forsake me. I have gone out from Thee, come out to seek me, and lead me up to Thy pasture, and number me among the sheep of Thy chosen flock, and nourish me with them on the verdure of Thy Divine Mysteries; for their pure heart is

Thy lodging-place, and therein is the illumination of Thy revelations clearly beheld, which is the comfort and refreshment of those who for Thy sake have travailed in afflictions and every kind of outrage.

May we also be deemed worthy of this illumination by Thy grace and love for man, O our Saviour Jesus Christ, unto the ages of ages. Amen.



Homily 17

On a rule for beginners and their state and the matters that pertain to them

THIS IS THE RULE OF LIFE that is chaste and pleasing to God: to refrain from glancing here and there with your eyes, but always to look steadily on what lies before you; to refrain from speaking idly and to say only what is necessary; to regard mean attire as sufficient for your body's need and, in like manner, to make use of foods that sustain the body, and not those that satisfy gluttony; to take a little from all foods, and not disdain some and select others and choose to fill your belly with these. Discretion is greater than all the other virtues. Without companions (when not ill or infirm), do not partake of wine. Do not interrupt the words of one who is talking, and contradict him like an ill-bred person; but like a wise man, be patient. And wherever you find yourself, consider yourself the inferior, and the servant of your brethren.

Do not expose any part of your body in front of any man; and do not touch the body of another, except for some necessary reason, nor permit anyone to touch your body without good cause, as I have said. Shun familiarity as death. Acquire a chaste rule for your sleep, lest the power that guards[1] you remove itself far from you. Wherever you sleep, if possible, let no man see you. Do not spit in front of anyone. If a fit of coughing comes over you while seated at table, turn your face to your back, and cough in this manner. Eat and drink with moderation, as befits the children of God.

Do not brashly stretch out your hand to take something from in front of your companions. But if a stranger should sit with you, urge him once or twice to eat; and set the table neatly, not helter-skelter. Sit with a neat and not a sprawling posture, exposing none of your limbs. When you yawn, cover your mouth so as not to be seen; but if you hold your breath it will pass. Should you go into your superior's

1. I.e. the guardian angel.

cell, or your friend's or disciple's, restrain your eyes so as not to see anything therein. And if compelled by a thought to do so, take good care lest you obey it and do this. For anyone brazenly disposed in these matters is a stranger to the monastic schema, and to Christ, Who has bestowed this schema upon us. Take no notice of the places where the articles of your friend's cell are kept. Open and shut your door quietly, and your companion's also. Do not burst in suddenly on anyone, but when you have knocked outside and been invited in, then discreetly enter.

Do not rush when you walk, unless compelled by some urgent need. Be obedient to all in every good work; but do not follow after the covetous, the avaricious, or the worldly, lest a diabolical work be done. Speak to all with meekness, look upon all with chastity, and do not satiate your eyes with looking on another's face. When you are journeying on the road, do not get ahead of your seniors; but if your companion gets ahead of you, hurry a little to catch up with him. For whoever does not do so is foolish, and little better than a swine that has no manners. If your companion should talk with any people he meets, wait for him and do not press him to go. Before the usual time, let him that is healthy say to him that is ill: 'Let us fulfill the body's need.'[2]

Do not chide anyone for any trespass, but think of yourself as accountable in all things and guilty of his fall. Do not refuse to do any lowly chore with humility, and in no wise decline from doing it. If you are compelled to laugh, do not show your teeth. If you are forced to speak with women, turn your face from the sight of them, and talk with them thus. But as from fire, as from the snare of the devil, keep yourself from nuns – from meetings with them, and conversations, and the sight of them – lest your heart be chilled from the love of God, and you pollute your heart with the mire of the passions. Even if they are your sisters after the flesh, withhold yourself from them as from strangers. Be on your guard against mingling with your kindred, lest your heart be chilled from the love of God. Avoid familiarities and conversations with youths as friendship with the devil. But have one confidant and sharer of your secrets: a man who fears God, and who always pays heed to himself; one who is poor in his place of dwelling, but rich in the mysteries of God.

2. A monastic expression meaning *Let us eat.*

Hide your secrets, your doings, and your warfare from all. Do not sit without a cowl before anyone else, except in case of necessity. Go forth to satisfy your need with chastity, as reverencing the angel that watches over you, and do it with the fear of God. Constrain yourself till death, even if your heart is displeased thereby.

[95] It is better for you to eat deadly poison than to eat with a woman, even if it should be your mother or your sister. It is better for you to live with a dragon than to sleep with a youth and share the same covers, even if it should be your brother after the flesh. When you are journeying on the road, if one of your seniors tells you, 'Come, let us chant,' do not disobey him. But if he does not say so, then be silent with your tongue, but with your heart give glory to God. Oppose no man in anything; do not quarrel, and do not lie, and do not swear by the Name of the Lord your God. Be despised, and do not despise. Be wronged, and do not wrong. It is better for things of the body to perish with the body than for something pertaining to the soul to be hurt. Go to court with no man, but endure to be condemned, being uncondemned. Have no love in your soul for anything which is connected with those in the world; submit to rulers and princes, but refrain from mingling with them, for such company is a trap that catches the more heedless to their perdition.

O glutton, bent on the worship of your own belly! It is better for you to cast a live coal into your stomach than the fried foods of rulers and princes. Pour your mercy out on all, and be moderate in all things. Keep yourself from much talk, for it is this that quenches the noetic movements produced in our heart by God. Flee from discussions of dogma as from an unruly lion; and never embark upon them yourself, either with those raised in the Church, or with strangers. Do not pass through the streets of the hot-tempered and quarrelsome, lest your heart be filled with anger, and the darkness of delusion dominate your soul. Do not dwell with a proud man, lest the energy of the Holy Spirit be taken from your soul and she become the dwelling of every evil passion.

If you keep these observances, O man, and occupy yourself continuously with the study of God, in truth your soul will see the light of Christ in herself, and will never be darkened unto all eternity. To Him be glory and dominion to the ages. Amen.

Homily 18

On the successive stages of the monastic life, briefly and distinctly noted; and how and in what way its virtues are born from each other

From activity that demands violence[1] there is born zeal beyond measure, set aflame in the heart by fiery thoughts that newly rise to the surface of our understanding. This work, and watchfulness, refine the mind by their fervor and grant it the faculty of sight; and this sight gives birth to fiery thoughts (those I have just mentioned) by means of the profundity of the soul's faculty of sight, which is called *theoria* (divine vision); and this same divine vision gives birth to fervor, and of this fervor that follows upon the faculty of sight that is of grace, there is born the flow of tears. At first only to a small degree: that is, repeatedly during the course of a single day tears come over a man, and then leave him again.

But from this comes weeping without cease, and from her unceasing tears the soul receives peace in her thoughts. And from peace of thoughts she is raised to limpid purity of the mind. And through this limpidity of the mind a man comes to see the mysteries of God, because of the purity that is laid up in peace from warfare.[2]

But after these things, the mind comes to behold that which in Ezekiel the Prophet is indicated by the apparition of the torrent, which depicts the figure of the three stages of soul that draw nigh to things divine; and beyond the third, there is no passage.[3] The beginning of all these things is a good purpose directed toward God, the manifold labors of stillness, and the straightforwardness that is born of prolonged separation from the world. There is no great need to speak of the forms of these labors one by one, since they are familiar

1. I.e. fasting, vigil, prostrations, and the like. *Vide* Matt. 11:12.

2. Compare this progression of *tears* to *peace* to *seeing mysteries* with the first full paragraph on p. 202.

3. *Vide* Ezek. 47:3–5. The Greek reads here *to behold revelations and signs, like those Ezekiel the Prophet saw depicting the three stages in which the soul draws nigh to God.*

to all. However, as stating them will do my readers no harm, but rather may be to their profit, I must not (as it seems to me, at least) shirk the task of setting them down.

They are: hunger; reading; night-long and sober vigil, according to a man's strength; and the numerous prostrations we are obliged to make both during the hours of the day and also frequently at night. Some make thirty prostrations at a time, and afterward kiss the precious Cross, and then withdraw from it. There are those who add to this number according to their own capacity. And there are others who stay three hours in one prayer and without effort possess a vigilant mind and no wandering of thoughts while they cast themselves upon their faces. Both these kinds of prayer – whether it be multiplicity, when one increases the number of prayers in his flaming ardor, or tranquillity, which is received by the soul, and which confines into a single prayer the multiplicity of the aforesaid prayers – display the great riches of goodness – I mean of grace – which is apportioned to each man according to his own measure. But as to what is the cause[4] of this second [*kind of*] prayer and how one continues in it free [*of the employment*] of all violent effort, this I have not thought it right to reveal, either by divulging its method through word of mouth or by writing, lest the reader, if he finds himself not understanding what he reads, should think what is written to be senseless; or, if he is knowledgeable in these things, should be led to look with disdain on one ignorant of this level of activity. So there will be reproach from one side and laughter from the other; and I shall be found gibbering
1 Cor. 14:11 like a barbarian when I speak of such matters, even as the word of the Apostle says, when he spoke of one prophesying.

Whoever, therefore, desires to learn these things, lo, their successive order is indicated above:[5] by the grace of our Lord let his doing of them follow up his consideration of them! And when in actuality he has come to these things, he himself will learn by himself, and will need no one else to teach him. For, 'Sit in thy cell,' it is said, 'and thy cell will teach thee all.'[6] And to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

4. The Greek word τρόπος usually means *manner, way,* but the Greek translators have occasionally used it to render the Syriac word *cause.*

5. Gk. *let him make his way on the path indicated above.*

6. St. Moses the Ethiopian. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 16, #62.

Homily 19

That abstention from cares is profitable for hesychasts; and that going out and coming in is harmful; and concerning distraction

THE MAN OF MANY CONCERNS can never be meek and peaceful, because the necessary demands of his affairs, in which he wears himself out, compel him to be involuntarily and unwillingly disturbed, and completely disperse his calm and stillness.[1] Therefore the monk must stand himself directly before the face of God and always fix his eye unyieldingly upon Him, if he really wishes to guard his mind, to purify and transform the slight movements which creep within him, and with tranquillity of thoughts to learn to distinguish what enters into and what comes out [*of him*]. For the many occupations of monks are a clear proof of their slackness with respect to readiness for the practice of Christ's commandments, and it betrays their failings in regard to divine matters.

Without freedom from concerns do not seek for light within your soul, nor for calm and stillness when your senses are lax, nor for collected senses amid engaging affairs. Do not multiply your occupations, and you will not find turmoil in your mind, or in your prayer. Without unceasing prayer you cannot draw near to God; and to introduce some other concern into your mind during the toil of prayer is to cause dispersion in your heart. If fiery thoughts arise in you when, through the consuming flame of divine things, you enjoy a taste of God, but when you seek to find them again, you discover them to be tasteless and cold in your soul, [*then know that this is because*] carefree converse with men has rushed upon you from some quarter, or because you have esteemed bodily labors above these things, and on this account the fervor of your thoughts has been chilled.

1. The Syriac printed text adds: *but without distractions the devil has no means of entering the soul.*

Tears, striking the head in prayer with the hand, and casting oneself upon the earth with fervor, waken the warmth of their sweetness inside the heart, and with a laudable ecstasy the heart soars up toward God and cries out: 'My soul thirsted for Thee, the mighty, the living
Ps. 41:2 God! When shall I come and appear before Thy face, O Lord?' Only the man who drinks deeply of this wine, and afterward is deprived of it, only he knows to what misery he has been abandoned, and what has been taken away from him because of his laxity.

O, how evil for hesychasts is the sight of men and intercourse with them! And in very truth, my brethren, association with those who have relaxed stillness is especially harmful. For just as the sudden blast of ice, falling on the buds of the fruit-trees, nips and destroys them, so too, contacts with men, even though they be quite brief and (to all appearance) made for good purpose, wither the bloom of virtue – newly flowering in the temperate air of stillness – which covers with softness and delicacy the fruit-tree of the soul planted by the
Ps. 1:3 streams of the waters of repentance. And just as the bitterness of the frost, seizing upon new shoots, consumes them, so too does conversation with men seize upon the root of a mind that has begun to sprout the tender blades of the virtues. And if the talk of those who have controlled themselves in one particular, but who in another have minor faults, is apt to harm the soul, how much more will the chatter and sight of ignoramuses and fools (not to say of laymen)?

For just as a highborn and honorable person, when he is drunk, forgets his own high birth and disgraces his station, and his honor is mocked by the untoward notions that suddenly come over him from the influence of the wine, so too the soul's chastity is made turbid by the sight and conversation of men, she forgets her habit of keeping watch, the object of her desire is blotted out from her mind, and the entire foundation of a laudable estate is ripped up from her.

Now if even when a man is silent and is merely found in the presence of such men and is content only to see and to hear, and nevertheless that which enters through a man's gates of sight and hearing is sufficient to produce in him turbidness and a chilling of his mind from things divine; and if a brief moment can cause so much injury in a monk with self-control – then what shall we say of continuous encounters, and prolonged involvement in these things? For the exhala-

tion which comes up from the stomach does not permit the mind to receive divine knowledge, but darkens it in the way that fog rising from the dampness of the land obscures the air.

Pride does not perceive that it walks in darkness and, as being [100] darkened, it does not know the insight of wisdom. For this reason in its own murky thoughts it elevates itself above all, whereas it is more vile and more feeble than any, and it is incapable of learning the ways of the Lord. And the Lord conceals His will from it, because it did not choose to walk in the path of the humble. But to our God be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 20

On the paths that bring a man nigh to God,
which are revealed to him by the sweet works of night vigil;
and that those who labor in this practice are fed
with honey all the days of their life

DO NOT IMAGINE, O man, that among all the works of monastics there is any practice greater than night vigil. In very truth, my brother, if throughout the hours of the day an ascetic is free from the distraction and agitation of physical occupations and of concern for transitory things, and if he keeps himself to some degree from the world and watches over himself while practising vigil, then I can easily tell you that his mind will be quick to take flight as it were on wings, and rise up toward God with delight; it will readily behold His glory and, because of its lightness and buoyancy, it will swim in knowledge that transcends human conception.

A monk who perseveres in vigil with a discerning mind will not seem to be clad with flesh, for this is truly the work of the angelic estate. It is impossible that those who pass their lives in the constant practice of night vigil should be left by God without great gifts on account of their vigilance, their wakefulness of heart, and the careful conducting of their thoughts toward Him. A soul that labors in the practice of vigil and excels therein will have the eyes of Cherubim, that she may at all times gaze upon and espy celestial visions.

I deem it impossible that a man who has chosen for himself this great and divine labor with forethought and discretion, who has elected to take up this burden and to struggle earnestly in the glorious part which he has chosen, should not guard himself by day from the disturbance of encounters and the cares of occupations, lest he be found destitute of the wondrous fruit and the great delight which he looks to enjoy from his vigil. And I dare say that whosoever neglects this does not know why he toils and refrains from sleep, suffers hard-

ship in his prolonged psalmody, in the weariness of his tongue, and in night-long standing, since his mind is not in his psalmody nor in his prayer, and being drawn along by custom, as it were, he labors without discernment. And if this were not as I say, then why does he not reap from the seeds he continually sows with toil an abundant harvest of benefactions?

But if, instead of these cares, he exercised himself in the reading of the divine Scriptures, which fortifies the understanding, especially irrigates prayer, is a helper and yoke-mate of vigil, and a light to the mind, he would then discover reading to be a guide in the straight path, and the sower of the seed of divine vision during prayer. He would find that reading binds fast his thoughts, keeping them from dispersion and wandering and from grazing amid vain things; that it unceasingly sows in his soul the remembrance of God, and of the pathways of the saints who have pleased Him; and that reading causes the understanding to acquire fineness and wisdom. In a word, he would eat the ripe fruit of his works.

Why, O man, do you govern your life with such a lack of discernment? You stand the whole night through and suffer travail in psalmody, hymns, and supplications, and does a little heedfulness during the day seem to you to be so great and arduous a task, if thereby you are deemed worthy of God's grace granted to you on account of your diligence in other works? Why do you wear yourself out, when at night you sow, but during the day you dissipate your toil which is thus rendered unfruitful, when you scatter the wakefulness, sobriety, and fervor which you have gained through night vigil, and without a reasonable excuse you vainly undo your labor by your disturbing intercourse with men and with things? If, however, you had made your cultivation and the fervor of your heart's converse during the day to conform to your night's meditation, and you had placed no wall of separation between them, then in a short time you would have embraced Jesus' bosom. From this it is evident that you lead your life without discernment and that you do not know why it is necessary for monks to keep vigil.

You suppose that these things were ordained simply to oblige you to labor, and not because of something else that is born of them. But the man who has been deemed worthy to learn by divine grace what

is that hope for the sake of which ascetics resist sleep, constrain their nature, and offer up their supplications by night through the wakefulness of their bodies and their reflections – this man will also know the strength that comes from guarding oneself by day, what help in vigil this gives the mind during the still of night, what dominion it receives
[103] over its thoughts, what purity and concentration is granted to it without great effort or conflict, and how its watchfulness by day permits it freely to gaze upon the greatness of the Scriptures.[1]

Hence I say also that if a man's body be enfeebled by illness and he cannot fast, vigil alone can gain for the mind steadfastness in prayer and bestow upon his heart noetic insight to understand [*the nature of*] spiritual power, provided only that confusion does not come over him by reason of laxity resulting from the day's affairs.

Therefore I entreat you that wish to acquire a watchful mind in God and knowledge of the new life: throughout your whole life never neglect the discipline of vigil. For by vigil your eyes are opened to behold all the glory of the monastic life and the strength of the way of righteousness.

But if – far be it! – the thought of laxity should assail you once again and, perchance, nestle within you as a trial from Him that helps you, and is wont to permit the state of your soul to vary (as, for example, in fervency or in coldness), or because of a certain reason, or because of bodily infirmity, or because you cannot endure the habitual labor of your long psalmody, your vigorous prayer, and the many prostrations you are accustomed to make: then I lovingly entreat you, that if these works depart from you and you cannot perform them, at least remain wakeful in a sitting position, pray within your heart, and make every effort to pass the night without sleeping, sitting and pondering over good thoughts. And if you do not harden your heart and darken it with sleep, then by grace that first fervor, lightness, and strength will return to you, and you will leap with joy, giving thanks unto God.

God permits coldness and heaviness to come upon a man in order to train and make trial of him. But if he zealously rouses himself and compels himself a little to shake off these things, then grace will immediately draw nigh to him, as it was formerly, and a different power

1. Lit. *the words*. This could also refer to the words pronounced during prayer.

will come upon him, bearing hidden within it all that is good, and every manner of succor.[2] He will marvel then with great astonishment, bringing to mind that former heaviness, and the lightness and strength which has now overtaken him, and considering the difference, and his present state, and how such a great change so suddenly found him. Henceforth he will be wise, and if again there should come upon him such heaviness, he will know concerning it from his former experience. If at the first assault, however, a man does not struggle, he cannot gain this knowledge. Do you see how a man becomes wise when he rouses himself a little, and perseveres with fortitude in the hour of warfare? But I do not here speak of the circumstance where the body's nature itself has grown feeble, not from warfare, but from the compulsion of illness; in such a case it is not profitable for you to wage war against your nature. In every other instance, however, it is profitable for a man to compel himself in everything. [104]

Continual stillness conjoined with reading, moderation in food, and vigil, speedily rouses the mind to awestruck wonder, unless there is some cause that shatters stillness. The thoughts that arise in stillness spontaneously and unexpectedly because of a man's labors make his eyes become two fonts of baptism by the flow of his tears which wash his cheeks in their abundance.

When your body is tamed by abstinence and vigil, and by the attentiveness of stillness, and yet you sense in your body piercing darts of the passion of fornication which do not result from a motion of nature, then know that you have been tempted by thoughts of pride. Straightway mix ashes with your food, O man, prostrate your belly upon the earth, and search out your proud thought. Study the variation of your nature and your contranatural deeds, and perhaps God will have mercy on you and will shed His light upon you, so that you may learn humility and your wickedness may not increase. Therefore, let us not cease to struggle and compel ourselves, until within ourselves we behold repentance and find humility, and our heart be brought to rest in God, to Whom be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

2. Syriac *in which are hidden ten thousand good things and helpful transformations.*

Homily 21

A narration concerning saintly men and the all-holy words I heard from them, and on their wondrous way of life

ONE DAY I went to the cell of a holy brother and, because of an illness, I lay myself down in one part of his cell, so that he could take care of me for God's sake; for I had no acquaintance in that region. And so I saw this brother's custom of rising at night before the other brethren to begin his prayer rule. He would recite the psalms until suddenly he would leave off his rule, and falling upon his face would strike his head upon the ground a hundred times or more with fervor that was kindled in his heart by grace. Then he would stand up, kiss the cross of the Master, again make a prostration, again kiss the same cross, and again throw himself upon his face. Such was his customary discipline, so that it was impossible for me to count the number of his prostrations.

Indeed, who could number the prostrations which that brother made every night? He would kiss the cross some twenty times with fear and ardor, with love mingled with reverence, and then begin again to recite the psalms; but all at once, from the mighty flame of the thoughts which kindled him by their fervor, he cried out, being overcome with joy and not able to endure the heat of the flame, for he could not contain himself. And I was greatly astonished at the grace of that brother, his struggle, and the sobriety he showed in the work of God.

In the morning after the first hour when he sat to read, he became like a man taken captive. With every chapter he read, he would fall many times upon his face, and at many of the verses he would raise his hands toward heaven and glorify God.

He was about forty years of age, his food was very meager and very dry, and because he often constrained his body beyond measure, he looked like a shadow. I pitied him because of the feebleness of his face which, from great abstinence, had wasted away and was scarcely

two fingers in width. Many times I said to him: 'Take pity on yourself, brother, in your manner of life, and spare this good discipline which you have acquired; do not confuse and cut short your rule of life which is like a spiritual chain, lest for the sake of the addition of a little toil you should stop in your course and leave it uncompleted. Eat with moderation, that you retain the ability to eat; do not stretch out your foot beyond your strength, lest you entirely lose the ability to work.'

He was merciful and very modest, and cheerfully showed mercy, chaste by nature, easily entreated, wise according to God, and because of his cheerfulness and purity he was loved by all. When his help was needed, for he was skilled in every task, he worked with the brethren, often for three or four days at a time, returning to his cell only in the evening.

Whenever he obtained something, he was unable to say that he did not have it (even if he had great need of it) because of his profound modesty before both great and small. Moreover, when he worked with the brethren, he did so because of his modesty, and he forced himself, since he did not like to leave his cell. Such was the discipline and life of that truly marvellous brother.

*On an aged elder**

On another occasion I went to a certain aged elder, an excellent and virtuous man who had great love for me. He was simple in his speech, but enlightened in knowledge, and had a deep heart, and he spoke those things which grace gave unto him. He did not often leave his cell, but only for the Holy Mysteries; he was very attentive to himself and preserved stillness.

Once I said to this man, 'Father, the thought comes to me to go early to the portico of the church on Sunday and to sit down there and eat, so that everyone who enters or departs will see and scorn me.'

To this the elder replied, 'It is written that every man who causes scandal for those of the world shall not see light. No one knows you in this region, nor does anyone know what your fame is, and so they will say, "The monks eat from the morning hours." But there is a greater reason: there are novices here who are still weak in their thoughts;

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

many of them have faith in you and are profited by you, and when they see you do this thing, they will be harmed. The fathers of old did such things because of the many miracles which they worked and the honor and great name they possessed among men. They did this,
[107] that they might be dishonored, to hide the glory of their way of life, and to drive away from themselves the causes of pride. But what necessity obliges you to do such a thing? Do you not know that every discipline has its rule and time? Your way of life is not singular, nor your name famous, for your discipline is that of the brethren; this thing would not be profitable to you and you would harm others.

'Further, such things are done by way of dispensation and are not beneficial for every man, but only the great and perfect, because herein there is unrestraint of the senses. They are detrimental to those in the middle state and to beginners, since these are in need of much watchfulness and submission of the senses. The elders, however, have passed through the period of watchfulness, and in all things which they choose, they find profit. Inexperienced merchants suffer great losses in great ventures, but they quickly become successful through less significant transactions. And again, as I said, there is an order for every work, and for every discipline there is a fixed time. Every man that before the time begins things that are beyond his measure doubles the harm, not the gain. If you truly desire that which you seek, patiently endure with joy the involuntary dishonor that providentially comes upon you, and be not troubled, nor hate the man who dishonors you.'

Once I conversed with this goodly elder, who had tasted of the tree of life through the sweat of his soul from the early dawn of his youth to the evening of his old age, and after he taught me many things concerning virtue, he said to me, 'Reckon every prayer, wherein the body does not toil and the heart is not afflicted, to be a miscarriage, for this prayer has no soul.' Again he said to me, 'Neither give nor receive anything from a man who is quarrelsome, who seeks always to maintain his opinion, whose mind is guileful and whose senses are shameless, lest the limpid purity which you have gained with great toil withdraw from you, and your heart be filled with darkness and turmoil.'

*On another elder**

Once I went to the cell of one of the fathers. This saint very seldom opened to anyone, but as soon as he saw from his window that it was me, he said, 'Do you wish to enter?' and I replied, 'Yea, reverend father.' After I had come in, prayed, and sat down and we had conversed a long time, finally I asked him, 'Father, what should I do? Certain people come to me and I neither gain nor profit from intercourse with them, but I am ashamed to tell them not to come. Often they hinder me from performing my usual rule of prayer, and this causes me grief.' That blessed elder answered in reply to these things with the following words.

'Whenever men who love idleness come to you, allow them to sit [108] a little while, then make as though you wish to stand up to pray. Say, bowing to the guest: "Brother, let us pray, for the time of my prayer rule has already come and I cannot let it pass, since if I try to perform it at another hour, this becomes a cause of turmoil and oppression for me. Except for dire necessity I cannot omit it, but now there is no necessity for me to set aside my prayer." Do not let him excuse himself from praying with you. If he says, "You pray and I shall go my way," bow before him and say, "For love's sake, make but one prayer with me, that I might be benefited by your supplication." Then, when you stand up, make your prayer longer than usual. If you do this each time they visit you, they will learn that you are not of like mind with them, nor do you love idleness, and they will in no wise approach the place where they hear that you are to be found.

'Take heed, lest being a respecter of persons, you annul the work of God. If, however, your visitor be one of the fathers or a wearied stranger, reckon his company in the place of your longest prayers. But if the stranger should prove to be one of the lovers of idle chatter, comfort him as much as you can and dismiss him in peace.'

One of the fathers said, 'I was amazed when I heard of monks who do handwork in their cells and are able to perform their rule of prayer without omissions and remain free of turbulence.' That man also said this marvellous thing, 'I tell you in very truth, that if I go out to pass

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

water, I am shaken from my habit [*of mind*] and its order, and I am hindered from my [*spiritual*] work and from the accomplishment of my rule of prayer.'

*On the question of a certain brother**

That same elder was asked by a certain brother: 'What should I do? Many times I obtain a thing I have need of because of illness, or because of my work, or for some other reason, and without this I cannot remain in my discipline of stillness, but when I see that someone has need of this object, I am overcome by mercy and I give it to him. Often it also occurs that being asked by someone, I give away that which I need, for I am constrained by love and the commandment to do so. Afterward, however, my need of the object causes me to fall into cares and turbulent thoughts, and thus my mind is distracted from solicitude for stillness. Often I am obliged to depart from my solitude and to go in search of that thing. But if I persevere
[109] and do not go out, I suffer much affliction and turmoil in my thoughts. I do not know which of the two alternatives I should choose: to interrupt and disperse my stillness for my brother's sake, or to disregard his request and continue in stillness.'

The elder said in reply to this: 'May that righteousness perish, and every form of mercy, love, compassion, or whatever is thought to be for God's sake, which hinders you from the practice of stillness; which fixes your eye upon the world; draws you into cares; shakes you from the memory of God; arrests your prayers; brings your thoughts to a state of turbulence and unrest; stops you from study of the divine readings (which is a weapon that rescues a man from wandering thoughts); disperses your watchfulness; causes you to walk about freely, though formerly you were bound, and to associate with men, though formerly you lived in solitude; awakens in you the mortified passions; abolishes the abstinence of your senses; resurrects your corpse which was dead to the world; causes you to fall from the angelic husbandry, whose labor has but one concern; and places you in the portion of men who live in the world! For the fulfilling of the duty of love with respect to providing for physical well-being is the work of men in the world, or even of monks, but only those who are imperfect, who do not dwell in stillness, or who combine stillness

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

with brotherly concord and continually come and go. For such men this thing is good and worthy of admiration.

'Those, however, who have chosen to withdraw from the world in body and in mind so that they might establish their thought in solitary prayer by deadness to what is transitory, to concern over all affairs, and to the sight and recollection of worldly things, should not serve in the husbandry of physical things and visible righteousness (so as to be justified for Christ thereby). Rather, by the mortification of their members which are upon the earth – after the apostolic utterance – they should offer Him the pure and blameless sacrifice of their thoughts, the first-fruits of their husbandry, and also the affliction of their bodies through their patient endurance of perils for their future hope. For the monastic discipline rivals that of the angels. It is not right for us to abandon this celestial husbandry and to cleave to material things.' Col. 3:5

On the reproach of a certain brother *

Once a certain brother was reproached that he should distribute what he had, but unabashed he replied boldly to him that found fault: 'Monks are not obliged to give alms, for it is the monk who can say to Christ with an unveiled face as it is written, "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee." He it is that possesses nothing upon the earth, who earns nothing for himself among material things, who in his mind clings to nothing visible, nor endeavors to acquire anything; if someone should give him something, he takes only what he has need of, but he seeks nothing beyond this, and he is like a bird in his way of life. Such a man is not obliged to give alms, because he has a work superior to almsgiving. Indeed, how could he give to another that of which he has been liberated? The man, however, who is distracted with matters of this life, who works with his own hands and receives from others, should give alms. To neglect this is manifest opposition to the Lord's commandment. If a man does not draw near to God in hidden ways, and he neither knows how to serve God in spirit, nor concerns himself with manifest actions which are within his power, on what does he place his hope to gain life? Such a man is foolish.' Matt. 19:27 [110]

Another elder said: 'I marvel at men who disquiet themselves in

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

their stillness by toiling so as to provide others with things pertaining to the body.' And again he said: 'We should not mix the work of stillness with care for anything at all, except for the things that are proper to stillness. Let every discipline be honored in its own place, lest we become confused in our disciplines. He who has many cares is the slave of many; but he who has forsaken all and cares only for the state of his soul, the same is a friend of God. Consider that there are many men in the world who give alms and fulfill [*the commandment of*] love of neighbor in matters pertaining to the body; but toilers in complete and beautiful stillness, and men entirely devoted to God, are scarcely to be found and are exceedingly few. Who among men in the world, who give alms or accomplish another form of righteousness through material things, has attained to one of the gifts which those who remain in stillness receive from God?'

Again he said: 'If you live in the world, practise virtuous disciplines suitable to laymen; but if you are a monk, distinguish yourself in the works wherein monks excel. If, however, you wish to practise both, you will quickly fall from the one and the other alike. These are the works of monks: freedom from worldly things, bodily toil in prayer, and unceasing recollection of God in the heart. So judge for yourself whether without these things the worldly virtues will suffice you.'

Question Is it really true that a monk who endures hardship in stillness cannot acquire the two modes of virtue – the outward and the inward, I mean – to keep in his heart both care for God and solicitude for other men?

Answer I am of the opinion that even though a man who wishes to dwell in stillness abandons all things, takes concern for his soul alone, and is without any care for the things of this life, he will still be unable perfectly to perform the work of stillness; therefore, how much more so if he has solicitude for others?

[111] The Lord has reserved for Himself men in the world who serve Him and take concern for His children, and He has chosen for Himself those who serve before Him. For a difference in rank is not only to be seen in the affairs of earthly kings, where those who stand always before the king and are confidants in his secrets enjoy greater glory than those who are engaged in external matters. But the same

can also be seen in what pertains to the heavenly King: how much greater boldness is acquired by those who are unceasingly initiated into His mysteries by conversing with Him in prayer; of how much greater heavenly and earthly wealth they are accounted worthy; and how much more apparent is their mastership over all creation, which does not gainsay their words; and clearly how much greater is their glory than all things rational and irrational, and than those who serve God by means of the possessions and the things of this life and please Him by their good deeds, though this be very great and most beautiful. Therefore, we should not take example from men who are deficient in the works of God, but from the holy athletes and strugglers who splendidly ran the course of their life, who upon earth cultivated the celestial Kingdom, who renounced earthly things once and for all and stretched out their hands toward the gates of Heaven.

By what means did the saints of old please God, those who journeyed before us on the path of our discipline? Did Saint John of Thebes,[1] the treasury of virtues, the well-spring of prophecies, please God as he remained secluded in his cell by comforting the brethren with things pertaining to the body, or was it by his prayer and stillness? I do not contest the point that many have proved well-pleasing to God through outward actions, but these are fewer than those who have done so through prayer and the abandonment of all. For the help given by those who live in stillness, who are held in great honor by their fellow brethren, is well known; I mean, how they help us by a word in the time of necessity or offer up a prayer in our behalf. If any recollection or care with respect to this life apart from these two activities[2] should settle in the heart of men who dwell in stillness, it will not belong to spiritual wisdom. For 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's,' that is, render to a neighbor that which is his, and to God that which is due to Him, was not said for dwellers in stillness, but for those who walk without. Those who persevere in the angelic labor, I mean in the soul's meditation, have not been commanded to please God in matters pertaining to this life, that is, to take concern for handwork or to receive from one man and give to another. For his la-

Matt. 22:21

1. Also known as John of Lycus, or Lycopolis. See Budge, *PHF*, Vol. I, pp. 320–34.
2. I.e. to help by a word and to offer up a prayer.

bor is in Heaven. A monk should not have any care that disturbs and draws his mind away from its stand before the face of God.

[112] But if someone should object and make mention of the divine Apostle Paul, how he worked with his own hands and gave alms, we answer him that only Paul could do all things, and we know of no other Paul ever existing, a man like unto him capable of all. Show me another man like Paul, and you will persuade me! Do not, therefore, bring forth things that come to pass by divine economy as a rule for ordinary actions. The work of preaching the Gospel is one thing; the activity of stillness, another. If you wish to hold fast to stillness, become like the Cherubim, who take no thought for anything of this life, and consider that no one else exists in creation save you yourself and God[3] Whom you heed, even as you have been taught by your fathers who lived before you. Unless a monk hardens his heart and forcibly restrains his compassion so as to become distant from solicitude for all other men, either for God's sake or for some material need, and perseveres only in prayer during the times which he has appointed without having affection and concern for others enter his heart, he will be unable to attain freedom from turbulence and cares and to live in stillness.

Whenever, therefore, you should have a thought to care for someone for virtue's sake, such that the tranquillity in your heart is dispelled, say to the thought, 'The path of love and mercy for God's sake is excellent, but for God's sake I do not wish it.' 'Wait for me, father,' a monk once said, 'because I am running after you for God's sake;' but the other replied, 'And I for God's sake am fleeing from you.'[4]

Abba Arsenius for God's sake conversed with no one, neither for spiritual profit nor for any other reason. Another man for God's sake spoke all the day long and received every stranger,[5] but he, on the contrary, chose silence and stillness. For this cause he conversed with the Spirit of God in the midst of the sea of the present life and passed over it with sublime tranquillity in the ship of stillness, even as it was clearly revealed to certain ascetics who inquired of God concerning

3. See Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 13, #47, 'Abba Alonius used to say, "Unless a man saith in his heart, 'Only God and myself exist in this world,' he will not find rest."'

4. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 235, ch. xvi[a].

5. Abba Moses the Ethiopian.

this.[6] And this is the definition of stillness: silence to all things. If in stillness you are found full of turbulence, and you disturb your body by the work of your hands and your soul with cares, then judge for yourself what sort of stillness you are practising, being concerned over many things in order to please God! For it is ridiculous for us to speak of achieving stillness if we do not abandon all things and separate ourselves from every care. But to our God be glory. Amen.

6. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, pp. 8–9, #21.

Homily 22*

On the different kinds of noetic powers of the mind employed in the working of revelations and spiritual visions

DIVINE VISION[1] is a non-sensory revelation of the mind. Divine revelation consists in the mind's being moved by spiritual insights concerning the Divinity. Yet the power to be moved at will [*by insights concerning*] the Divinity, without having received a revelation from divine grace, is not even implanted in the nature of angels. It is one thing to be moved by revelations concerning God's operations, and another to be moved by revelations concerning the nature of His being. The first naturally comes to us through an occasion furnished by perceptible things. But the second does not take occasion from the understanding or from anything else. For, they say, this is the threefold and principal purity of the parts [*of the soul*], and not one in a thousand of the righteous is found to be worthy of this lofty [*noetic*] perception. And indeed, the *theoria* concerning our Lord's incarnation and His manifestation in the flesh is also said to arise from *theoria* concerning the Divinity.[2]

Our genuine vision of the angels consists in our being moved by spiritual insights concerning those things which pertain to them. It is, indeed, impossible for us to behold the spiritual powers outside the domain of our mind. When a man is deemed worthy to behold them in their very nature and in their own realm and as it were in their spiritual created state,[3] grace moves his mind by the revelation of spiritual insights concerning them. When the soul is purified and has been accounted worthy of beholding her fellow servants, the vision of them is not received with these physical eyes. For the angels are not corporeal [*so as to be seen*] without the soul's faculty of vision, which is true *theoria*, whereby they are seen as they are, without alteration;

* This homily is found only in Syriac.

1. I.e. vision pertaining to the Divinity.

2. Lit. *divine theoria*.

3. Lit. *in the created state of their spirituality*.

that is to say, they do not condescend from their nature in the visions [*men have*] of them. A man cannot receive this genuine vision without the second purification of the mind.

But when angels appear to men in certain forms, this is not true vision; but on the order of a dispensation, the angels confer these things in their ministry. Or they manifest themselves through a vision involving the senses for the comfort and encouragement of the simple. Indeed, such visions are even seen by impure men. The first order [*of visions*], however, belongs to illumined and wise men who have been exalted by the glorious discipline of stillness to the rank of purity.

*On that which during prayer occurs within stillness**

Who is the man that knows that delightful bending of the knees, when the tongue is still and the heart silently utters some doxology in the unbroken sweetness of its thoughts and the body is still, resting upon the knees? Blessed is he who partakes of these things continually! Yet such things do not happen at will, nor when a man seeks for them. This is the particular delight that is granted as a consolation to those who guilelessly walk before God in the discipline of stillness. Now if a man perseveres in this discipline with all simplicity, diligently caring for the purity of his monastic labor, and if his way of life is worthy, then after some time he will be vouchsafed also those things mentioned above. But as for beginners in this discipline whose aim is set straight ahead, grace first gives them to taste these things and their like during their reading and it draws their thoughts to itself, carrying them away from all meditation on earthly matters. Then they will labor, keep vigil, and pray, and they will not grow weary. But to those who are but a little practised in the mysteries of stillness, [*noetic*] perception is given in both their prayer and their liturgy.

* In the Bedjan Syriac printed text, this short passage is a new homily bearing this title.

Homily 23

On the many different kinds of prayer, and the dominion of the mind; and to what extent this dominion is empowered to initiate its own movements in the different forms of prayer; and what the natural limit of prayer is, and to what extent you are empowered to pray therein; and that when prayer exceeds this limit, it is no longer prayer, although this activity is called prayer

GLORY BE TO HIM Who richly pours forth His gifts upon men! For although they are clad with flesh, He has made men to minister unto Himself in the order of the incorporeal natures; He has deemed the earthly nature, and even sinful men like us, who are unworthy even to hear such words, worthy to speak concerning these mysteries. But by His grace He has dispelled the hardness of our hearts, that we might gain understanding from the divine vision of the Scriptures and the instruction of the great Fathers. For by my own struggles I have not been vouchsafed to experience even one thousandth part of what I have written with my hands, and especially in this homily which I now compose for the kindling and enlightenment of our souls, and of those who come across it, with the hope that, perchance, some might rouse themselves by reason of their desire for what I speak of, and endeavor to practise it.

The sweetness of prayer is one thing, and the divine vision of prayer is another; and the second is more honorable than the first, as a mature man is more perfect than an immature child. Sometimes verses become sweet in a man's mouth, and during prayer one verse is chanted numberless times and does not permit him to continue to the next, for he can find no satiety therein.

But sometimes a certain divine vision is born of prayer, and the prayer of a man's lips is cut short, and stricken with awe by this vision he becomes as it were a body bereft of breath. This (and the like) we call the divine vision of prayer, and not, as fools affirm it to be, some image and form, or a representation of the imagination. And further,

in the divine vision of prayer there exist measures and distinctions of gifts.

Till this point it is still prayer, for the mind has not yet passed to where there is no prayer: that state is above prayer. The movements of the tongue and the heart in prayer are keys; what comes after them, however, is the entrance into the treasury. Here let every mouth, every tongue become silent, and let the heart (the treasurer of the thoughts), and the mind (the ruler of the senses), and the reason (that swift-winged and most shameless bird), and their every device be still. Here let those who seek tarry, for the Master of the house has come.

*On pure prayer**

Even as the whole force of the laws and the commandments given by God to men terminate in the purity of the heart, according to the word of the Fathers, so all the modes and forms of prayer which men pray to God terminate in pure prayer. For sighs, prostrations, heartfelt supplications, sweet cries of lamentation, and all the other forms of prayer have, as I have said, their boundary and the extent of their domain in pure prayer. But once the mind crosses this boundary, from the purity of prayer even to that which is within, it no longer possesses prayer, or movement, or weeping, or dominion, or free will, or supplication, or desire, or fervent longing for things hoped for in this life or in the age to come. Therefore, there exists no prayer beyond pure prayer. Every movement and every form of prayer leads the mind this far by the authority of the free will; for this reason there is a struggle in prayer. But beyond this boundary there is awestruck wonder and not prayer. For what pertains to prayer has ceased, while a certain divine vision remains, and the mind does not pray a prayer.

Every mode of prayer originates from a motion,[1] but once the mind enters into spiritual movements, there is no longer prayer. Prayer is one thing, and the divine vision of prayer is another, even [117] though each takes its inception from the other. For prayer is the seed, and the divine vision is the harvesting of the sheaves, whence the

* This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily.

1. The Syriac adds *of the soul*. The words *motion* or *movement* used here have the secondary meaning of *a thought*, i.e. a mental motion.

reaper stands in ecstasy before the unutterable sight, how from the mean and naked seed which he sowed, such rich ears of wheat have suddenly burst forth before his eyes; then he remains entirely motionless in his divine vision.

Every prayer is a supplication, or a request, or a thanksgiving, or an offering of praise. Diligently seek out whether there exists one of these modes of prayer, or a request for something, when the mind crosses that boundary and enters into that realm. This I ask of men who know the truth, because not everyone possesses this degree of discernment, but it belongs only to those who have beheld and ministered unto this mystery, or have been taught by such Fathers [*as have attained to this*], and have learned the truth from their mouths, and have passed their lives in these inquiries and the like.

Just as among ten thousand men scarcely one will be found who has fulfilled the commandments and what pertains to the Law with but a small deficiency, and who has attained to limpid purity of soul, so only one man among thousands will be found who after much vigilance has been accounted worthy to attain to pure prayer, and to break through that boundary, and gain experience of that mystery. Indeed, the majority of men have in no wise been deemed worthy of pure prayer, but only a very few. But as to that mystery which is after pure prayer and lies beyond it, there is scarcely to be found a single man from generation to generation who by God's grace has attained thereto.

Prayer is a supplication, a care, and a desire of something: of deliverance from trials here, or in the age to come, or a desire of the inheritance of the Fathers. It is a plea for something whereby a man is helped by God. The motions of prayer are delimited by these movements.

Purity or impurity of prayer is to be determined in this manner: if, at the time when the mind makes ready to offer up one of its aforementioned movements, a foreign thought commingles with it, or it wanders in something, then this prayer is not to be called pure; for it has brought an unclean animal to the altar of the Lord, that is the heart, the noetic altar of God. But when the mind fervently embraces one of these motions during the time of supplication – corresponding to the compulsion of the occasion – and when on account of its great

ardor the gaze of the motion is drawn by the eye of faith to enter within the veil of the heart, then henceforth the entrances of the soul are closed by this to alien thoughts, the same which are called strangers and which the Law forbids entrance into the Tabernacle of Witness. This is named the acceptable sacrifice of the heart and pure prayer. Its boundaries are, again, until this point. But what lies beyond cannot be called prayer.

Someone might, however, bring to mind what is named *spiritual prayer* by the Fathers, and not comprehending the force of their words, might say, 'This also belongs to the domain of prayer.' But I am of the opinion that if anyone should make inquiry into the meaning of this, he will find it blasphemous for a created being to say that spiritual prayer can be prayed at all. For any prayer that can be prayed is inferior to what is spiritual; and anything that is spiritual is free of movement. And if a man can scarcely pray with purity, what shall we say concerning spiritual prayer? [118]

The Fathers were wont to call every good motion and spiritual activity by the name of prayer; and not only they, but all those enlightened by knowledge were wont to reckon good activities to be nearly the same as prayer, while it is evident that prayer is one thing, and things accomplished, another. Sometimes, spiritual prayer is called by some *theoria* and by others *knowledge,* and again by others *noetic vision*. Do you see how the Fathers interchange appellations for spiritual things? For the exactitude of designations holds valid for things here, while there is no perfect or true name whatever for things of the age to come, but a simple [*state of*] knowing only, surpassing every appellation, every rudimentary element, form, color, shape, and compound name. For this reason once the soul's knowledge is raised out of the visible world, the Fathers employ whatever appellations they please to indicate that [*state of*] knowing, since no one knows its name with exactness. But to make the soul's deliberations steadfast therein, the Fathers resort to appellations and parables, according to Saint Dionysius, who writes: 'We use parables, and syllables, and permissible names, and words, on account of our senses; but when our soul is moved by the operation of the Spirit toward those divine things, then both our senses and their operations are superfluous when the soul has become like unto the Godhead by an incomprehen-

sible union, and is illumined in her movements by the ray of the sublime Light.'[2]

Therefore, my brother, you may be certain that the mind has the power to discern its own movements up to the domain of purity in prayer. And when the mind has attained to it, either the mind turns
[119] back or it abandons prayer; so then prayer becomes as it were a mediator between the natural and the spiritual state. Whenever the mind moves, it is found in the natural realm; but once it enters into that other realm, it ceases from prayer. The saints of the age to come do not pray with prayer when their minds have been swallowed up by the Spirit, but rather with awestruck wonder they dwell in that gladdening glory. So it is with us, at the time when the mind is deemed worthy to perceive the future blessedness, it forgets itself and all things of this world, and no longer has movement with regard to any thing.

Wherefore one may dare to say with confidence that the free will guides and moves every virtue and every order of prayer (whether performed in the body or in the mind), and even the mind itself, that sovereign over the senses. But as soon as the governance and the stewardship of the Spirit rule the mind, the steward of the senses and the thoughts, then a man's nature is deprived of its free will, and is led by another guidance, and does not direct itself. Where, then, will there be prayer, when a man's nature has no authority over itself, but is led whither it knows not by some other power, and is not able to direct the movements of the mind in that which it chooses, but at that moment is held fast in a captivity by which it is guided whither it does not perceive? But according to the testimony of Scripture, at such a time a man will not possess a will, nor will he know whether he is 'in
2 Cor. 12:2 the body or out of the body.' Therefore, shall there be prayer in a man who is thus taken captive and does not even have cognizance of himself?

2. *On the Divine Names* 4, §11 (*PG* 3.708D). The Greek text here rendered is a translation from the Syriac translation and consequently it has some discrepancies with the original. A translation of the original text of St. Dionysius reads as follows: 'We use sounds and syllables and phrases and descriptions and words on account of our senses, since when our soul is moved by noetic energies (operations) to things noetic, both the senses and that which they perceive become superfluous; just as, in turn, the noetic powers are superfluous when the soul, having become Godlike by an unknowable union, throws herself upon the rays of the unapproachable Light with sightless hurlings.'

Whence let no one blaspheme and dare to affirm that it is possible to pray spiritual prayer. Yet such is the audacious claim of those who pray with impudence and, being ignorant of all knowledge, delude themselves, saying that they can pray spiritual prayer when they wish.[3] But humble and sagacious men condescend to learn from the Fathers to know the bournes of their nature, and they do not suffer their mind to be surrendered to this audacity.

Question Why, then, is this ineffable grace called by the name of prayer, if it is not prayer?

Answer This, we say, is because it is granted to the worthy at the time of prayer, and it has its inception from prayer. For, according to the testimony of the Fathers, there is no other time of visitation appropriate to this most glorious grace, save the time of prayer. Verily, for this reason it is called by the name of prayer, because the mind is led by prayer toward that beatitude, and because prayer is its cause, and at no other time does it take place, as the writings of the Fathers explain. Indeed, we see how many of the saints (as it is also recorded [120] in the narration of their lives) are ravished noetically while they stand at prayer.

But if one were to ask, 'Why is it only at this time that these great and ineffable gifts are granted?' we should reply: because at this time more than all others a man is prepared and collected so as to give his attention to God, and he yearns for and awaits mercy from Him. But to put it briefly, prayer is the time of standing at the gate of the King to make supplication; and the entreaty of him that beseeches and makes supplication is fittingly granted at this time. Indeed, what other time is there when a man is so ready and carefully watchful as at the very time of prayer? Or is it meet, perhaps, that a man should receive a gift of this kind when he is sleeping, or working, or when his mind is distracted? For lo, even though the saints are never found idle (since at every moment they are occupied with spiritual matters), yet there are times when they do not stand in the readiness of prayer, because often they meditate upon one of the histories in the Scriptures or upon the divine vision of created things, or other truly profitable subjects.

3. Here St. Isaac refutes the errors of the Messalians. The words *those who pray* also mean *the Messalians*.

During the time of prayer, however, the vision of the mind gives heed only to God, and stretches forth to Him all its movements, and it offers Him the heart's supplication with eagerness and constant fervor. Wherefore at this time, when the soul has but one care, it is meet that divine favor should well forth from God. For lo, we observe that when we are offering the visible Sacrifice everyone has made ready and has taken his stand in prayer, seeking mercy from the Deity, making supplication and concentrating his mind upon God, then the Holy Spirit comes upon the bread and wine which are set upon the altar table.

At the time of prayer an angel appeared to Zacharias and announced to him the conception of John. Likewise while Peter was praying on the roof at the sixth hour, he beheld the vision which, by means of the sheet that descended from Heaven and the beasts therein, led him to call the nations. And an angel appeared to Cornelius while he prayed, and spoke to him those things written concerning him.

Luke 1:8 ff.

Acts 10:9 ff.

Acts 10:3 ff.

Josh. 7:6 ff.

Num. 7:89

Exod. 29:42; 1 Kgs. 3:1; Luke 1:8 ff.

Lev. 16:2; Heb. 9:7

Num. 20:6

And again God spoke to Jesus the son of Navi when he bowed his face to the earth in prayer. And again, from the mercy seat over the ark (whence the priest was initiated in visions from God concerning everything needful), when the High Priest once a year during the dread time of prayer entered into the Holy of Holies and cast himself down upon his face while all the tribes of Israel were assembled and standing in prayer in the outer tabernacle, the High Priest heard the oracles of God through an awesome and ineffable revelation.

[121]

O how awesome was the mystery that was ministered in this ceremony! So also in the time of prayer were all visions and revelations made manifest to the saints. For what other time is so holy, and by its sanctity so apt for the reception of gifts, as the time of prayer, wherein a man converses with God? At this time (when we make our petitions and our supplications to God, and we speak with Him) a man forcefully gathers together all the movements and deliberations [*of his soul*] and converses with God alone, and his heart is abundantly filled with God. From this he begins to understand incomprehensible things, for the Holy Spirit moves in each man according to his measure, and taking material from that which a man prays, He moves within him, so that during prayer his prayer is bereaved of move-

ment, and his mind is confounded and swallowed up in awestruck wonder, and forgets the very desire of its own entreaty. The mind's movements are immersed in a profound drunkenness, and it is not in this world; at such a time there will be no distinction between soul and body, nor the remembrance of anything, even as the great and divine Gregory has said: 'Prayer is the purity of the mind, and it is terminated only by the light of the Holy Trinity through awestruck wonder.' Do you see how prayer is terminated through the astonishment of the understanding at that which is begotten of prayer in the mind, as I said at the beginning of this homily and in many other places? And again the same Gregory writes: 'Purity of mind is the lofty flight of the noetic faculties, which resembles the hue of the sky, and upon and through which the light of the Holy Trinity shines at the time of prayer.'

Question And when is a man accounted worthy of the whole of this grace during the time of his prayer?

Answer This comes to pass, he says, when the mind puts off the old man and puts on the new man of grace, and then it sees its purity to be like unto heaven's hue, which was also called the 'place of God' by the council of the elders of the sons of Israel, when it was seen by them in the mountain. Therefore, as I have said, one must not call this gift and grace spiritual prayer, but the offspring of pure prayer which is engulfed by the Holy Spirit. At that moment the understanding is yonder, above prayer; and at the discovery of something better, prayer is abandoned. Then the understanding does not pray with prayer, but it gazes in ecstasy at incomprehensible things that lie beyond this mortal world, and it is silenced by its ignorance of all that is found there. This is the unknowing that has been called higher than knowledge. This is the unknowing concerning which it has been said, 'Blessed is the man who has attained the unknowing that is inseparable from prayer,' of which may we be deemed worthy by the grace of the only-begotten Son of God, to Whom be all glory, honor, and worship, now, and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Exod. 24:9 ff.

[122]

Homily 24*

On the subject of a discourse spoken by true knowledge

EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE PERCEIVED by the senses, whether an action or a word, is a manifestation of something hidden within, if the cause of the thing [*perceived*] is not accidental and the thing is a continual activity. A recompense is reckoned for the latter case, but the former is only slightly taken into account; that is to say, the strength or weakness of the will in the doing of evil or good deeds is not evidenced by anything that happens accidentally, but the proof of [*the will's*] free choice is understood from [*a thing's*] continued existence.

Sometimes power is given to an accidental occurrence so as even to defy the free will. Accidental occurrences, whether good or evil, befall a man as an incentive, or a trial, or for training, or as a recompense. The occurrence which is an incentive is good; the trial is considered evil [*by men*]; but the occurrences for training and for recompense are both [*good and evil*]. There are no chance occurrences, for nothing fortuitous happens to a man, whether good or evil. The will of God, which anticipates prayer, provides for every prayer, and by His wisdom He determines accordingly what is for our help. There is a Pilot Who steers the things of this world; and there is a guardian[1] with each one of us, whose notice nothing escapes and who never weakens, but all occurrences are very carefully managed by this appointed guardian, and in these four kinds [*of accidental occurrences*] his management is active.

The prayer filled with sorrow, when a suitable manner of life is joined with prayerful sorrow, changes the character of occurrences and brings about improvement [*in a man*]. It strengthens and makes steadfast the good man, while to the evil man it gives a change to the opposite direction. Therefore do not doubt what I have said: there is no occurrence that is by chance and has no Pilot. If indeed prayer

* This homily is found only in Syriac.

1. I.e. the guardian angel.

combined with integrity of life is able to alter or to restrain [*occurrences*], we should believe that every occurrence has a Pilot. Blessed is the man who compares every occurrence that befalls him with his own hidden state, who seeks out its cause and sees Him that governs it!

For him that would be wise towards God, there is no other way but to be a fool to the world and a hater of human glory. Astonishing is the son of man who by self-reproach conceals the greatness of his labor; at such a man the angels marvel. Let involuntary shortcomings be reckoned by you as the custodians of righteousness, for these are even found from time to time in vigilant men.

There is no prayer so quickly heard as the prayer whereby a man asks to be reconciled with those who are angry with him. For when he charges himself with the offense, this prayer is immediately answered.

If, although you do what is proper and are vigilant over your life, you see yourself as feeble and are despicable in your own eyes and hate the glory of men, then know that in very truth you walk on the path of God. But if you perceive in yourself that you are far from these things and, when you sound yourself out, you see that even imaginary thoughts of censure cause you pain, then know that you are devoid of the truth and are deceived by vainglory.

Homily 25*

On the things that are bestowed upon a brother within his cell

MANY TIMES it happens to a brother during the hours of the day, that even if you were to give him an earthly kingdom, he would not be persuaded at that hour to leave his cell or to have any man knock at his door. For the time of [*spiritual*] commerce has suddenly come for him. Such things occur on days that are considered days of rest, but often at times of going in and going out.[1] For suddenly grace visits him with tears beyond measure, or with an ardent feeling that wells up in the heart, or with a certain joy that has no [*apparent*] cause, or with delight in prostrations.

I know a brother who put the key in the door of his cell to lock it, so that he might go out and allow his spirit to graze, as Scripture says, and there grace visited him and he turned back straightway. Let no man, therefore, find fault with a brother if, on days whereon he does not observe canonical stillness,[2] it should sometimes occur that he absents himself from the communal church services of the brethren. And this is especially so if he is not one of those reputed to be negligent or given to vain occupations, and if he does not absent himself from the services for bodily labors.

You know, my brethren, that our labor is not only that which is accomplished before the eyes of men, but that we have a work which is hidden from men's eyes and which novices and laymen do not know. For you are fully aware that the solitary is under rule and is not his own master. If one of the brethren happens to come to visit with him and he does not respond, that brother should turn back immediately without finding fault with his brother, for he does not know what the other is engaged in at the time.

* This homily is found only in Syriac.

1. I.e. times of worldly dealings.

2. Or *stillness according to his rule.*

The cell of a solitary is the cleft in the rock where God spoke with Moses, as the Fathers say. But monastics who have not experienced this through the work that consists in a true taste of stillness do not know these things, and they despise their brethren and judge them, claiming for themselves equality with them in all things they do.

Sometimes it happens that a certain dire warfare is permitted suddenly to assail a brother and he finds himself in danger. Although his hands are crossed upon his chest, it does not flee from him; he falls upon his face, beseeching God, and [*at such a time*] he cannot endure to hear a man's voice. These variations are known to those who have passed through them in this great sea and are acquainted with the winds that blow there. And it happens that the thought of repentance springs up in him and that suddenly his former deeds are assembled with the recollection of his departure and they stand up before him. Then even this brilliant sun will be dark in his eyes and every memory of this world will be effaced from his heart.

It also happens that waves suddenly rise up against him and his ship is swallowed up in hidden abysses. Such things as these, which are unknown to most men, unexpectedly come upon the solitary in his stillness by reason of the devil's violent combats, and he gives himself over to mourning in his cell. There are many variations in this sea, and who is there that comprehends its labors, the magnitude of its commerce, and the wondrous pearls that lie in its depth, and also the beasts that rise up therein? Blessed is the man who throughout his entire voyage sleeps not, even until he reaches the harbor of departure [*from this life*]! There is no man who loves something and does not multiply his efforts. No man is able to be engrossed in divine things if he has not forsaken and despised temporal things, becoming estranged from the world's honors and pleasures, cleaving to the shame of the cross, and drinking gall and vinegar daily on account of afflictions, men, demons, and poverty. Heb. 12:2

Strive diligently, my brother, and be like the wise merchant, carrying your pearl and wandering throughout the whole earth, being cautious lest its luster be marred. And be vigilant, lest perchance it be stolen from you because of your laxity and you go to Sheol[3] with anguish.

3. I.e. the realm of the dead, Hades. See also p. 292, note 1.

Pursue the small consolation that is acquired in time from toil, that you may be accounted worthy of that great consolation which dispels the troubles of this life of sorrows for those who find it. Do not despise small things, lest you be deprived of great ones. Has no one ever seen an infant who, when he puts flesh in his mouth, sucks milk? By means of small things the door is opened to great ones. You dishonor
[127] God, O my brother, in that you desire Him to govern you without a definite order.[4] For no man has been entrusted with great things without first having been tried in small ones.

Set this firmly in your heart, my brother, and bring me to mind when it comes to pass: you will find that every lodging-place which you will reach tomorrow on this path of virtue and knowledge of the truth will be more glorious and excellent than those wherein you previously passed the night. You set off, and you are struck with awe at the beauty of the lodging that you enter today. Yet its beauty is swallowed up by the beauty of what you will come upon tomorrow. Who can perceive all the delightful changes of the mind? Only pray, that the door be opened before you.

Beware of despair. You do not serve a tyrant, but your service is to a kind Lord, Who, taking nothing from you, yet has given you all. And when you did not exist at all, He fashioned you so that you would be in that [*state*] in which you now are. Who is sufficient to render Him thanks for the fact that He has brought us into existence? O the immeasurable grace! Who is sufficient to glorify Him that has given us knowledge of all things? And not only of those which are manifest, but also of hidden things. For we know that if there is anything we do not know, it is necessary for us only to ask this [*knowledge*] from Him. Who has taught you, mortal man, to be stirred up by the desire of seeking to know that of which your nature has no knowledge?

Never seek consolation that lies outside the heart, for thus discerning knowledge dictates. Raise yourself above all consolation that the senses provide, so that you may be accounted worthy to receive that [*consolation*] which is within, beyond the senses. The solitary who has estranged himself from the consolation of the world and does not await daily the consolation of Christ, is dead during his lifetime. For

4. I.e. in a disorderly way.

God is very compassionate and ardently loves to give, but He wishes that we should be the cause thereof. Indeed, He rejoices when a man offers Him a wise prayer.

It is a sign of the beginning of a man's recovery from his illness when he desires hidden things. There is, however, a delay until he witnesses true health. The man who finds it tedious to make entreaty is the companion of him who becomes despondent when there is a delay. Tedium causes a man to put off making supplication in prayer, that is to say, it impedes supplication. Despondency cuts off prayer and prevents its prolongation. But expectation causes a man to acquire patience and stimulates him to linger in prayer. Expectation relieves the limbs of the weight of fatigue, for it knows how to give rest to the heart amid its afflictions. There is no burden whose weight is more pleasant than labor undertaken with expectation, nor is there any companion whose intimacy is so desirable as expectation. Even [128]
prison is pleasant for the man who dwells there with expectation. Make this your companion, O repentant brother, and you will not be conscious of any of the labors of your struggle. If you are in your cell, it will be with you. And if you find yourself among men, establish your mind in it, and your heart will never wander toward anything earthly, and this world and all that is in it will be a stranger to you. And if you lie down to sleep, make it your bedfellow, and until you sink into sleep, converse with it. Then no polluted thought will draw nigh your heart, because your [*mind's*] converse is immaterial, and no material object whose sight troubles the mind can make its appearance there. For there is no demonic thought that can manifest itself detached from a material appearance.

From long-suffering in prayer the fruit of life arises, and expectation is a firm helper during prayer to those who possess it. When you pray, bring to mind the ploughman who sows in hope. He Who gives back double the seed that the ploughman sows with hope, Who has esteemed the seeking of His Kingdom and His righteousness to be greater than temporal things, will Himself reward your entreaty ac- Matt. 6:33
cording to His promise. Amen.

Homily 26

On the profit that comes to the soul that seeks after profound theoria, that she might immerse herself therein away from the carnal thoughts that arise from the recollections of things

EVERY THING THAT IS ABOVE ANOTHER is concealed from what is beneath it. This is not, however, because it possesses by nature a sort of veil composed of some other body; therefore [*when it wishes*] it is able to uncover its hiddenness. No noetic essence acquires from outside of itself the distinction of its own rank, but these distinctions are confined within its motions.[1] That is, to put the matter more plainly, it can, without mediation, enter in to receive the primal light more easily than a lower order [*from*] which, evidently, it does not differ in locality, but according to the high degree and capacity of its purity, or according to the measure of the noetic beings [*therein*] as regards their capacity to receive signs and powers from above.

Every noetic essence is hidden from the essences that are below it; yet they are not concealed from them by nature, but by the excellence of their motions. This I say concerning the orders of the holy powers, the orders of souls, and the orders of demons. The first are concealed from the second, and the second from the third, by nature, place, and by respective movements. Each of the orders[2] is separate, and moreover with respect to knowledge they are hidden from one another, whether they are seen or not; but they are hidden from those beneath them by nature. For the faculty of sight of the bodiless is not from outside, as it is in the case of beings who possess bodies, but their ability to see one another is said to come from within their mo-

1. In this homily the word *motions* or *movements* seems to mean *activity* or *operations*, but we have left the translation literal; the Syriac *motions* also is often used in other contexts to mean *thoughts*.

2. Gk. *τάγμα*. Here St. Isaac probably refers to the different divisions among angels, souls, and demons.

tions, by both the excellence and the measure of their motions. For this reason, if they are honored with an equal portion, then even though they be distant from one another, they see each other, not in phantasy, but in real nature with unerring sight; howbeit they see not the Cause of all, Who transcends this distinction, Who alone is worshipful.

The demons, though they are extremely polluted, are not concealed from one another in their own orders; howbeit they do not see the two orders that are above them. For spiritual sight is the light of motion, and these very [*motions*] are their[3] mirror and their eyes; but when the motions are darkened, they cannot see the orders above them. Now the demons, as being the most dense of the spiritual orders by comparison, can only see one another. So much for the demons.

As for souls, to the degree that they are defiled and darkened, they are neither able to see one another, nor themselves. But if they cleanse themselves and make their way back to their ancient created state, they will clearly see these three orders, that is, the order below them, the one above, and one another [*in their own order*]. But I do not mean to say that angels, demons, or other souls must be transformed into a bodily form so that pure souls can see them. On the contrary, they see into their very nature and their spiritual order.

But if you say that it is impossible for a demon or an angel to be seen if they are not altered and take on a [*physical*] form, then it is not the soul that sees, but the body. And if this be so, what need is there of purification? For, behold, how at times demons as well as angels appear even to the impure; yet when they see, they see with bodily eyes, and there is no need here of purification. It is not so, however, with the purified soul; for she sees in a spiritual manner with a natural eye, that is, the clairvoyant eye of insight.

Do not marvel that souls can see one another even while they are in the body, for I shall give you most clear proof of this from one who bears witness to the truth, I mean the blessed Athanasius the Great, in his life of the great Anthony. Once, he says, while the great Anthony was standing at prayer, he saw someone's soul being raised aloft with

3. I.e. noetic natures.

much honor, and he called blessed the man who had been deemed worthy to receive such glory. This was the blessed Ammon of Nitria. Now the mountain where Saint Anthony lived was thirteen days distant from Nitria.

[131] This example has proved what was said concerning the three aforementioned orders, namely that even if spiritual natures are separated from one another, they see each other, and that distances and the bodily senses do not prevent them from seeing one another. So it is that purified souls do not see bodily, but spiritually. For bodily sight pertains to things that are evident, and it sees that which is before it. But things that are distant require another kind of vision.

The highest orders are numberless according to their existence and are named corresponding to their distinction and order. For why else should they be called Principalities, Powers, Authorities, and Dominions unless, perhaps, it is because they are specially honored? They are fewer in number than those who are in submission to them, as Saint Dionysius the Bishop of Athens has said, while in power and knowledge they are great, and singular with respect to the magnitude of their own orders. They are arrayed from order to order until they reach that one [*order*] which is more ancient and mighty and glorious than all, which is the beginning and foundation of all created things.

The beginning, I say, but not the Creator[4] of the primordial wonders of God's works. For there are many [*orders*] that are inferior with respect to [*their knowledge of*] the providence of the wisdom of God, their and our Creator; and they are as much inferior as the orders below them are in turn inferior to them. By inferior I mean their exaltation or lowliness not in a spatial sense, but as regards their power and knowledge, in proportion to the measure which they have attained as a result of greater or lesser knowledge.

The divine books have given all these spiritual essences nine spiritual names and divided them into three divisions of three each. The first is composed of the great, sublime, and most holy Thrones, the many-eyed Cherubim, and the six-winged Seraphim; the second in order is composed of the Dominions, the Authorities, and the Powers; the third is composed of the Principalities, the Archangels, and

4. I.e. the Son.

the Angels. The names of the orders are thus interpreted from the Hebrew tongue: the Seraphim means those who are fervent and burning; the Cherubim, those who are great in knowledge and wisdom; the Thrones, receptacles of God and rest.[5]

These orders are given these names because of their operations. The Thrones are so called, as being honorable; the Dominions, as [132] those who possess authority over every kingdom; the Principalities, as those who govern the atmosphere; Powers, as those who have power over the nations and every man; Authorities, as those who are mighty in power and dreadful in appearance; the Seraphim, as those who make holy; the Cherubim, as those who carry; the Archangels, as vigilant guardians; the Angels, as those who are sent.

On the first day eight noetic natures were created, seven in silence and one by a verbal command, and this was light; on the second day Gen. 1:3 the firmament was created; on the third day God gathered the waters and made the herbs to sprout forth; on the fourth day, the division of light; on the fifth day, the birds, reptiles, and fishes; and on the sixth day, the animals and man.

The frame of the whole world is length and breadth. The head is the East; the foot is the West; the right is the North; the left is the South. God laid out the entire earth as a bed, and the highest heaven as a vault. He fixed the second heaven as a wheel that adheres to the first heaven, and the borders of heaven and earth are joined to one another. He set the ocean as a girdle that encompasses heaven and earth; therein He established lofty mountains reaching even to heav-

5. The Syriac continues with a direct quote from St. Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchies* Bk. 7, §2. We give here a translation from the Greek original: The beings of this first order are called beholders, not because they are beholders of noetic things as it were by sensible symbols, or because they are led up to the Deity by the diversity of the *theoria* of sacred Scripture, but because they are filled with light which is more sublime than all immaterial knowledge, and are brimming (as far as possible) with the divine vision of that supraessential and threefold Beauty Who is the Origin and Maker of beauty. In like manner they are deemed worthy of communion with Jesus, not through sacred images which formatively engrave the deifying likeness, but as really drawing nigh to Him in that first participation of the knowledge of His deifying illuminations.... And [*they are called perfected*] because they are filled with a primary and transcendent deification, according to the highest knowledge of the operations of God that angels can have. (*PG* 3.208BC)

en, and He ordered the sun to journey behind the mountains all the night long; He set the great sea[6] within the mountains and it dominates over one-half and one-fourth of the dry land.[7] To our God be glory. Amen.

6. The *great sea* and *the ocean* refer to two different bodies of water.

7. Syriac *dominates four times* [*the area of*] *the dry land and one-fourth is dry land.*

Homily 27*

Against those who say: If God is good, why has He made these things?

SIN, GEHENNA, AND DEATH do not exist at all with God, for they are effects,[1] not substances. Sin is the fruit of the will; there was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist. Gehenna is the fruit of sin; at some point in time it received a beginning, but its end is not known. Death, however, is a dispensation of the wisdom of the Creator; it will have power over nature only for a time; then it will be totally abolished. *Satan* is the name of the will's turning aside from the truth, and not the designation of a nature.[2]

Even if you should find some of these things written in other places, O my brother, may we not be reckoned in your eyes as ostentatious men, who display ourselves with the works of others, but on the contrary as humble men, who suck the milk of our Fathers who have gone before us – I mean those things which we have gathered and placed before ourselves as objects of *theoria*, with the aim of enriching our understanding with these provisions, whereon we can graze and be sustained. For we have not forgotten that we do not rise above the rank of learners so long as we dwell in the flesh.

Discernment consists in the direction a man's natural thoughts take.[3] For when the thoughts by their motions proceed on nature's path, they encounter the changing elements and the ages [*of the world*]; but when they proceed on a second way,[4] there will be for

* This homily is found only in Syriac.

1. Or *acts*.

2. After giving the Syriac etymological meaning of the word *satan*, St. Isaac explains that *turning aside* (*satan*) is not a *substance* (*that exists by nature*), but an *act* or *effect* (*caused by the will*), and therefore does not exist with God. The creature bearing this name, Satan – whose personal existence is not denied here – took upon himself this activity. Though this activity may cease, the creature will continue to exist, just as in the case of sin and the sinner.

3. Lit. *discernment is the mobility of natural thoughts.*

4. I.e. contranaturally.

them another employment than that which they had. For when the natural [*thoughts*] in the intelligence are twofold in their employment, they will be recognized in one of these only, that is, in the order which does not pertain to the soul.[5]

When you encounter sweetness in the verses of your liturgy, your mind greedily desires to enjoy that sweetness continually; and if you wish to grant its request, quickly strive to know the cause of such delight. If you reach it swiftly, as a discerning and not a blind man, it will not be difficult for you to enjoy it always without hindrance. And what, then, is the active agent which is also called 'cause'? A file, without adding anything to iron, makes it bright and radiant, for such is the essence of iron. How? It removes the rust which has come upon it when it was unused. The same holds true for *theoria* in relation to the nature of the mind; bring your mind to the file and you will find how it shines clearly during your liturgy, emulating the brilliance of the stars. For the mind is unable to proceed onward without this action and it lingers when unattended. For this reason I said that during psalmody – but not during the prayer of the heart and reading – the mind can be held fast only with difficulty. But this is not the case with prayer and reading; with them only small care is needed. Furthermore, their assistance during psalmody is necessary. Indeed without them, diligence in psalmody will be found to be in vain. And they, again, at the very time when nourishment is furnished, give support to psalmody and not from any other quarter than from these provisions.[6] For hunger knows how to procure food, but it will not be persuaded to refrain from eating it.

Sweet to the laborer is bread earned by his own sweat. Until a man has sweated, the bread of truth will not satisfy him. The body, which is the laborer, sweats, and it nourishes the rational mind. And this occurs when the mind is deprived of its customary unnatural nourishment.

Spiritual virtue is the daughter of the will's virtue, and necessarily so. Therefore free will, not bondage, is the natural power of reason. But when it turns to one side or the other and stays there, then it en-

5. I.e. the corporeal order.

6. This sentence is extremely obscure in the Syriac. The *provisions* are probably the substance or material of reading and prayer.

genders another power, which is not of nature. When this was engendered, free will came to be governed by, and subject to, compulsion, and I may confidently call it bound and without dominion over itself. Before this, compulsion was a matter of the will, but now compulsion has the will in subjection. This, I say, can be seen on both sides, [135] whether a man enslaves himself to the right or gives way to the left. But the mind that knows how to see keenly is able to perceive in every instance how compulsion subdues free will when this power not found in nature is born of voluntary subjugation. I do not mean here the power that is born of habit, which is very difficult to withstand, but that which is called 'the vindicator.' At any rate habit is subject to the will, although it is a laborious thing to resist habit. Apart from this we know of two powers: one enslaves the will, but the other prevails upon nature itself and even has authority to alter nature. This power, which is an energy[7] that overrides nature, is known to those who have experienced it.

The different states of men's hearts and the dissimilar ways of thinking that are usually born of them – whether free or not free, [*engendering*] life or death – are greatly assisted by the ununiformity[8] of the *theoria* that arises in men's minds concerning God's judgments. The world has been kept for thousands of years in this ununiformity, which is placed in the midst [*of things*]. This ununiformity greatly assists the variableness of the courses found on the path of mortal life, and what is greater still, it leads men to *theoria* concerning the [*divine*] judgments that engender conceptions about God.

It is the case with many hearts, that as soon as confidence has entered within them, they become like a man that has taken deadly poison. For even with true and genuine sons, ten parts of love should be mixed with five parts of fear. Nature that is subject to aberration is not sufficient to receive here the perfection[9] of divine truth or to know completely the will that God has for rational beings. Even men such as Paul and his like are insufficient for this, until the time come

7. Or *operation*. This refers to divine grace.

8. Or *inequality, disparity, unevenness*. Here we add part of Wensinck's footnote (p. 130): 'Disparity is a term which, as well as its opposite, often occurs in cognate works, but of which it is not easy to give a clear definition. Dionysius the Areopagite is well acquainted with the idea (*ἰσότης* and *ἀνισότης*).'

9. Or *fulfillment, completion*.

that aberration[10] should be taken away, so that nature should no longer go astray through the influence it feels from aberration.

What is uniformity and ununiformity?[11] The ununiformity of *theoria*, which in one soul changes and varies, is the incomprehensibility of God's eternal mind,[12] while uniformity [*of theoria*] is the revelation of truth. If nature, which is inclined to aberration, should receive here the real truth, it would die by reason of the impetuosity of aberration. This is the 'O the depth of the riches' and 'How unsearchable are His judgments' and 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord,' and the like. Such things as these from time to time unexpectedly come upon the mind in a marvellous way and a man sighs deeply. Some call this the dark cloud. From this are born the ununiformity of *theoria* and the diversity of conceptions concerning the incomprehensible searching-out of God's judgments.

Rom. 11:33
Ibid.
1 Cor. 2:16

[136] But when the perfection of nature shall come in that world which is not subject to aberration, nature will no longer shrink from knowing divine truth, fearing lest it might incline toward the left because of confidence. Confidence breeds contempt and an impetuous way of thought. But fear, on the other hand, is wont to bind up aberration and keep it bridled. You will discover this fear in your soul through *theoria* concerning the diversity of God's judgments and the ages; and concerning the ununiformity of the courses of men's lives and the diversity of the recompenses appointed to each even now; and concerning God's justice which manifests itself from time to time, and then is held back because of His long-suffering; and through *theoria* concerning righteous men and sinners, and the adverse nature of dissimilar encounters with persons who are providentially opposed to you. When the understanding beholds these things, the entire soul is moved. And then there is born in the soul the inquiry into thoughts, words, and deeds, and into the delineation of the fixed boundaries of God's justice.

But when the understanding withdraws itself from this and ascends solely toward the Existent One by beholding the properties of

10. *Aberration* as it is used in the remainder of this homily should be understood to mean, *The tendency to go astray, inconstancy, mutability.*

11. Or *parity* and *disparity, equality* and *inequality.*

12. I.e. way of thought. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:16.

that good Nature which possesses eternal knowledge that precedes all existent things, and by beholding all His other properties, then immediately fear is cast out and the mind is sustained by confidence.

When, however, the understanding descends once more from thence and spreads itself out toward the different ages and their distinctions, it turns to flight and gives place to fear. And this is especially because providence does not consent to allow the understanding to remain always in that *theoria* of the truth.[13] Therefore from time to time it takes away from the heart the power of confidence which is aroused by true *theoria* and it allows it to be harassed by diverse conceptions. This occurs so that a man should not desist from continually judging the truthfulness of his thoughts and actions and thus should acquire vigilance, for he does not know how he will meet the judgment of God, to Whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

13. I.e. when it beholds God through His properties.

Homily 28

On the vision of the nature of incorporeal beings, in questions and answers

QUESTION In how many different ways is human nature able to receive vision of the nature of incorporeal beings?

Answer The direct apprehension of every simple and subtle nature of spiritual bodies comes within the grasp of the sense faculty of human nature in three ways: in the grossness of substance, which is a non-essential manner;[1] in the subtlety of substance, which is a non-essential manner; or in true *theoria*, which is essential vision. In the first, the senses hold sway; in the second, the soul sees superficially; in the third, the power of the mind's nature operates. Further, of the last two, one is dominated by the will and mind, and one by the will and the light of the soul and what strengthens the same. Firstly, then, will is the cause; and these are offspring of the free will, even if the free will and the faculty of volition are quiet at the time of their[2] employment, so long as the operation [*of the modes of vision*] is active and persists. But only one mode of vision[3] manifests itself independently of the will and of true knowledge, because independently of the will the senses take in everything that comes to pass. The holy angelic powers employ all these three modes in their fellowship with us for our instruction and the establishment of our life.

The abominable demons, however, can only stir up in us the first two modes, as they draw nigh in order to destroy us and not to profit us. They cannot come to us by the third mode in order to lead us astray, because they have no power whatsoever to set in motion the natural thoughts of our mind. For it is impossible for the sons of darkness to approach light. But the holy angels possess this ability: both to set the natural thoughts in motion and to enlighten them. The demons, however, are the lords and creators of false notions, the off-

1. I.e. a manner not corresponding to essence.
2. I.e. the offspring, the modes of vision.
3. I.e. the first.

spring of darkness. For from luminous beings light is received; from darksome beings, darkness.

Question For what reason was this given to the angels, but not to the demons?

Answer Every one of these teachers [*of men*] must first see in himself the insight which he teaches; he must learn it, receive it, taste it, and then only can he offer it to his disciples. The first teachers, the angels, transmit the precise reality of things from their own sound knowledge, which they are able to gain by the swift comprehension of their exceedingly keen and pure understanding. But although the demons possess keenness, they lack light. Keenness is one thing, light another. The first without the second brings its possessor to destruction. The second reveals the truth, but the first, a phantom of the truth. For light reveals the reality of things, and in proportion to the measure of a man's way of life, it waxes and wanes.

The holy angels infuse into us that knowledge of the movements of things which they have first tasted and understood, for only then do they transmit it to us. Likewise the second teachers, the demons, set in motion within us conceptions about things according to the degree of their knowledge; for when they have not [*received*] permission to lead us astray, it is necessary for them to set in motion in us right thoughts about such things. Nevertheless be certain, as I said before, that even if we are capable of receiving true divine vision, they would be incapable of teaching it to us, though indeed they possessed it in the beginning. Further, each one of these teachers, the angels or their opponents, inspires his disciples in accord with divine economy, by which that teacher is governed.

I hold as a truth, nevertheless, that our mind, without the mediation of the holy angels, is able of itself to be moved toward the good uninstructed; however, our mind cannot come to know evil or be incited by it without the mediation of the demons or the senses. The mind cannot work evil of itself; for good is implanted in its nature, but not so, evil. Everything that is alien and comes in from without requires a mediator so that knowledge of it might be gained; but that which is implanted within unfolds itself in nature without instruction, be it but dimly. But although our nature is such that of itself it moves toward the good, its development and illumination cannot come to

[139] pass without the divine vision received from angels. They are our teachers, even as they are of one another; for the lower ones are taught by those who oversee them and possess more light, and so each order is illuminated from the one above even up to that one [*order*] which possesses the Holy Trinity as Teacher. And further, this very first order itself says openly that it is not instructed of itself, but
1 Tim. 2:5 it has Jesus the Mediator as its Teacher, from Whom it receives and then transmits to those below it.

It is my opinion that our mind does not have a natural power to be moved to the vision of Divinity. And in this one deficiency we are the peers of all the celestial natures, for without investigations and reasonings, both in us and in them, grace moves that which by nature is foreign both to the human mind and to the angelic. For vision concerning the Godhead is not to be numbered among the other kinds of vision. For we possess vision of the natures of things through participation in their twofold nature, because there is a portion of all things in us. But we do not have a portion of the nature of the [*Divine*] Essence, and so neither do we have [*by nature*] vision of It. Now this vision is not stirred by nature in the rational beings of the first and middle orders, but by grace it is set in motion in all minds, both celestial and terrestrial; nature cannot comprehend this, as it does other things.[4]

Before Christ's incarnate coming, the vision that [*sees*] by the mind, whereby the order of the celestial beings is moved, and the faculty of seeing, was not within the power [*of terrestrial beings*], so that they could penetrate into these mysteries. But when the Word was made
Col. 4:3; flesh, in Jesus a door was opened unto them, as the Apostle says.
1 Cor. 16:9;
2 Cor. 2:12 Yet it is my opinion – and indeed it is true – that although we men should purify and cleanse ourselves, yet without [*the angels'*] mediation, our mind will not be able to attain to the revelations and insights which lead to that eternal divine vision which is in very truth the revelation of mysteries. For our mind does not have a capacity as great as that of the most sublime beings, who without mediation receive revelations and divine visions from the Eternal One. But even they [*receive these revelations*] from Him in a likeness and not nakedly; and in like manner our mind also, and likewise the other orders, except

4. E.g. the arts, the sciences, the properties of created beings.

that one which [*receives them*] from Jesus Who holds the scepter of the Kingdom. By means of transmission each order receives from another[5] revelation concerning the divine governance and the discernment thereof, from the first to the second and so on until the mystery has passed through all the orders. [140]

There are, however, many mysteries which remain with the first order and do not pass on to the rest; for these cannot receive the magnitude of the mystery, but only the first order can. Some mysteries proceed forth from the first order and are only revealed to the second, where they are kept in silence and remain unknown to the rest of the orders. And there are mysteries which proceed as far as the third and the fourth orders. There is also greatness and lowliness in the revelations that are manifested to each of the orders of the holy angels. One order is enriched with revelations, and mysteries of a lofty degree are revealed to it, and it receives superabundant illumination. But another is inferior to the former, and its motions are too weak for these mysteries.

Thus in the reception of revelations there is abundance and scarcity, greatness and smallness among the spiritual orders. Except for that single and chief order which is the first of all the orders, the rest receive divine vision and indications concerning the whole of the divine governance [*of things*] from their fellows. If, therefore, it is thus with the celestial orders, how much less should we be able to receive such mysteries without the angels and without mediation?

Whenever the perception of the revelation of a mystery descends into the minds of the saints, this is also from the angels. When it is permitted by God, a mystery is revealed from a higher [*angelic*] order to a lower one, even unto the lowest; and in the same manner, when it is permitted by the divine nod that a mystery should come even to human nature, it is transmitted by those[6] who are wholly worthy of it. For by their intermediary, the saints receive the light of divine vision, [*leading*] even to the glorious Eternal Being, the mystery which cannot be taught; and the angels receive from one another, 'for they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation' through the awareness of true insights that are proper to them. Heb. 1:14

5. I.e. the one above it.

6. I.e. by the angels.

In the age to come, however, this order of things will be abolished. For then one will not receive from another the revelation of God's glory unto the gladness and joy of his soul; but to each by himself the Master will give according to the measure of his excellence and his worthiness, and he will not receive the gift from another as he does here. Then there will not be he that teaches and he that is taught, nor any whose deficiency must be filled up by another. For one is the Giver there, Who gives without mediation to those who receive; and those who win joy, procure it from Him. For they do not perceive Him through diverse intellections, but by [*direct*] revelation of Him, without departing from Him through thoughts. There the order of those who teach and those who are taught ceases, and on One alone hangs the ardent love of all.

[141] I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. For what is so bitter and vehement as the punishment of love? I mean that those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment from this than from any fear of punishment. For the sorrow caused in the heart by sin against love is sharper than any torment that can be. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. Love is the offspring of knowledge of the truth which, as is commonly confessed, is given to all. The power of love works in two ways: it torments those who have played the fool, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. Thus I say that this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the sons of Heaven by its delectability.

Someone was asked, 'When will a man know that he has received the remission of his sins?' He answered, 'When in his soul he becomes conscious that he has completely hated them with his whole heart, and when he governs himself in his external actions in a manner opposed to his former way of life. Such a man, as having already hated his sin, is confident that he has received remission of his sins by reason of the good witness of his conscience which he has acquired, after the saying of the Apostle, "A conscience uncondemned is a witness of
Rom. 2:15 itself."' And may we also gain remission of our sins by the grace and love for man of the unoriginate Father with His only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, to Whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 29

On the example and similitude furnished by a divine vision concerning the Lord's Day and the Sabbath

THE LORD'S DAY is a mystery of the knowledge of the truth that is not received by flesh and blood, and it transcends conceptions. In this age there is no eighth day, nor is there a true Sabbath. For he who said that 'God rested on the seventh day,' signified our nature's rest from the course of this life, since the grave is also of a bodily nature and belongs to this world. Six days are accomplished in the husbandry of life by means of keeping the commandments; the seventh is spent entirely in the grave; and the eighth is in departure from it. Gen. 2:2

Just as those who are worthy receive in this world the mysteries of the Lord's day in a similitude, but not that day itself as long as they are in their bodily nature, so ascetic strugglers receive the mysteries of the Sabbath in a similitude, but not the true Sabbath itself, which is repose from every sorrow and perfect rest from every troublesome passion. For God has given us to taste a mystery, but He has not ordained that we should here lead our lives in the true reality. The true Sabbath, the Sabbath that is not a similitude, is the tomb, which reveals and manifests perfect repose from the tribulations of the passions and from the toil against them. The whole man, both soul and body, there keeps the Sabbath.

In six days God ordered the constitution of this world, He fixed the elements, and He gave their constitution unresting motion for the accomplishment of their liturgy, and they will not cease from their course until the dissolution. From the force of these primordial elements He fashioned our bodies. But neither did He give the former repose from their motion, nor our bodies, formed from them, repose from their husbandry. He fixed repose as a limit to our corporeal elements so that they should follow their primeval kinship with the earth, which means dissolution from this life. Thus He said to Adam,

'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread.' Until when? 'Until
Gen. 3:19 thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken.' 'And the earth
Ibid. 3:18 shall bring forth unto thee thorns and thistles,' which are mysteries [*signifying*] the husbandry of this life, for as long as a man lives.

Luke 22:44 But from the time of that night when the Lord sweated, He changed the sweat that brought forth thorns and thistles into a sweat in prayer and the husbandry of righteousness.

For more than five thousand years the Lord left Adam to toil in that first husbandry, because the path of the saints had not yet been
Heb. 9:8 revealed, as the Apostle says. But in His goodness He sojourned among us in these latter days and commanded the human free will to exchange sweat for sweat, not allowing us complete repose from all toil, but rather an exchange. In this manner He manifested His loving-kindness toward us, because of our prolonged and wearisome hardship upon the earth. If, therefore, we cease to sweat in the labor of prayer, we shall necessarily reap thorns; for cessation of prayer means a tilling of the earth's corporeality which by nature brings forth thorns. For the passions are thorns indeed, and they spring up from the seed that lies in our body. Inasmuch as we bear the image of Adam, we necessarily bear his passions also. The earth cannot discontinue to bring forth shoots in accord with its nature. The earth of our body is an offspring of this earth according to the divine testimo-
Gen. 3:20 ny, 'The earth from which thou wast taken.' The first brings forth thorns; the second (which is rational), passions.

If by way of a mystery the Lord was for us in every respect a type and paradigm in all the diverse works of His dispensation, and even until the ninth hour of the Great Friday He did not rest from labor and wearisome toil (which is a mystery of the husbandry of our entire life), but reposed only in the tomb on the Sabbath, where are those who say that in this life there is a Sabbath, that is, repose from the passions?[1]

The Lord's day, however, is too great a thing even for us to speak of. Our Sabbath is the day of the grave; it is here that our nature truly
[144] keeps the Sabbath. Necessity, therefore, obliges us daily to uproot thorns from the earth of our nature so long as it exists, and because of our prolonged toil at this husbandry the thorns will diminish; but you

1. I.e. the Messalians.

will be unable to cleanse yourself from them entirely. If, therefore, it is the case that during a brief spell of sluggishness or because of a little negligence the thorns multiply, cover over the face of your earth, choke your seed, and obliterate your toil, then it is clearly necessary to purify your soil each day. Cessation from this causes a multitude of thorns to spring up, of which may we be cleansed by the grace of the consubstantial, only-begotten Son of God, to Whom together with the unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 30*

On different suitable ways of wise guidance for the instruction of disciples

Ecclus. 1:1 ALL WISDOM COMETH FROM THE LORD, as has been said; and through our own dealings, we are instructed to become wise with respect to the Lord's dealings with us. Now the Father of truth deals with His sons in different ways. For the profit of His sons He restrains Himself from uniformity that consists in always showing to them the same face. Nay rather, to discipline them, He secretly withdraws His love. Thus He displays the appearance of a state that does not really exist;[1] but that which He is, He restrains.

A wise son recognizes his father's care for him as well as his discerning love in the changes of his behavior toward him. The activity of true love, when rightly understood, will appear twofold: in what causes joy but also in what causes sorrow. That is to say, love is constantly ready to give pleasure to its beloved; yet sometimes it causes its beloved to suffer for the very reason that it loves much, and it suffers with its beloved even as it causes suffering. It firmly resists the stirrings of natural compassion, fearing lest its beloved should be harmed afterward. Love, on the one hand, urges communion; but knowledge, on the other, strengthens [*love*] to resist these sentiments. The forms that are taken by wise love vary according to the voluntary changes in the recipients of these dispensations. Let us not ask foolish love of a wise friend. The man who kills his son by feeding him honey does not differ from the man who kills him with a dagger.

It is unbecoming to the wisdom of love to give the identical kind of sustenance to its beloved in times of both health and sickness – I speak here of those [*times*] in which the will undergoes variations because of the thoughts that it accepts, and not of bodily [*sickness*]. If we know how to govern those times when with discernment we show our love for someone, especially when he is in obedience to us, is it

* This homily is found only in Syriac.

1. I.e. that He is devoid of love.

not right that we should attribute to God the knowledge how to accomplish the deeds appropriate to His discerning love for us, even if we merely liken them to the variations we know how to make in our dealings with our loved ones? These variations are difficult to bear; I also know it myself. Yet it is profitable nonetheless. Your nature's proclivity to aberration causes you to be in need of these variations, if not as a recompense for things already past, then for fear of what in any case will occur. Distressing occurrences are to interior instruction what helpful medicines are to imbalance[2] of the body's constitution.

Every non-composite created thing is free of struggle in its way of life, whether it be corporeal[3] or incorporeal.[4] Labor naturally exists only amid ununiformity,[2] and ununiformity exists only in composite beings because of their conjoined duality.[5] And even though there are, and are said to be, among non-composite and simple beings those who are subject to aberration, this [*capacity for turning aside*] is entirely toward the right, and effortlessly, since they have no experience of the left. Indeed, they are affected only by the good. For their [*tendency to*] aberration is bridled by ardent love, and where there is love, there is neither struggle nor fear. Now this is so although they possess self-dominion; from self-dominion aberration is also said to originate, and for this reason they are worthy of even greater praise.

Good and evil deeds are the offspring of free will. Where free will is lacking, the doing of [*good or evil*] deeds is superfluous with respect to receiving a recompense. There is no recompense for what is natural; a reward is bestowed for a conflict, and no one speaks of a victory where there is no struggle. When opposition is taken away, freedom also vanishes with it; henceforth nature remains without struggle. A time is reserved for the abolition of freedom, and thereafter the faculty of reason will be bound, both in the sons of men and in angels. Here I speak of the faculty of reason, not the faculty of be-

2. Lit. *inequality.* See p. 259, note 8.

3. E.g. the animals, which are *corporeal, non-composite* because having a body but lacking reason and free will, and therefore *free of the struggle* entailed by moral choice.

4. The holy angels are *incorporeal, non-composite* because lacking a body, and *free of struggle* because their state is permanent, as explained in the last four sentences of this paragraph.

5. I.e. the duality of body and reason-endowed soul.

ing sensibly moved; for in the realm of intelligence the rational faculty possesses two properties, that is, two powers: the power of reason and the power of knowing. The former is altogether limited; but through the latter, nature is crowned – I mean, intelligent nature. Even so, this power also will be bound at that time; not by a compulsory bond, but by a bond of delight, a delightful coercion. Sometimes this happens even now to a very few in a mystery – nonetheless, it is through rapture.

Now, this[6] is found in rational beings of the first [*order*],[7] without rapture, in so far as possible, though they are not yet perfect. And
[147] why is it without rapture and without being perfect? There are mysteries that cannot be received before the appointed time. On this account they are imperfect, and not because they possess through rapture the state wherein they now abide. For they do not experience this[8] at all, but rather a constant state and not rapture. And though there be rapture, it is to things still more excellent. So then, rapture for them[7] is a more excellent change, but for us it is abolition[9] by reason of the weakness of the flesh.

6. I.e. the *bond of delight*, *delightful coercion* mentioned just above.
7. I.e. the angels. 8. I.e. rapture. 9. I.e. of freedom.

Homily 31

Containing a most necessary and extremely beneficial daily reminder for the man who has chosen to sit in his cell and give heed to himself alone

ONE OF THE BRETHREN wrote the following and placed it before him continually, reminding himself thus and saying: 'You have wasted your life in senselessness, O miserable man, worthy of every evil; but at least be vigilant today, for this remains to you from the days that have passed away empty, devoid of every good work and filled with all evil. Do not ask concerning the world, nor life therein, nor concerning the monastics, nor what pertains to them, nor how they fare, nor how great are their labors, and do not concern yourself with anything of this nature. You took leave of the world in a mystery and reckoned yourself as dead in Christ; live no longer to the world nor to those in the world, so that rest might forestall you, and that you might live in Christ.

'Be ready and well prepared for every form of disgrace, outrage, mockery, and reproach from all men. Accept all this with joy as being truly worthy of it, and patiently endure every pain and affliction and every peril from the demons whose will you once did with gladness. Valiantly bear every necessity, that which occurs naturally, and all bitter trials. Through your trust in God, endure deprivation of that which is necessary for the body, but soon will change to dung.

'Desire to receive all your needs through your hope in God, and do not wait for deliverance from another quarter or for consolation from another man. "Cast thy care upon the Lord" and condemn yourself in every temptation as the cause thereof. Be scandalized with no man and blame no one who causes you sorrow, because you have eaten of the forbidden tree and acquired many passions. Joyfully accept bitter trials, that they may violently shake you but for a little, and that afterward you may be sweetened. Ps. 54:25

'Woe to you and your foul-smelling glory, for you have left your

soul uncondemned, though she is full of every sin, and you have condemned others in word and thought. Enough, enough of this swine-like food which has been your sustenance until this very hour! What have you to do with men, you filthy wretch? Are you not ashamed to have dealings with them, seeing that you have lived so senselessly? If you give heed to these things and keep them, perhaps you may be saved with God's help. But if you do not, you will depart to a place of darkness, to the dwellings of the demons, whose will you did with face unashamed. Lo, I have testified to you on all these matters. If, therefore, God were justly to turn men against you to recompense you for the outrages and reproaches which you have contemplated and spoken against them your whole life long, then the entire world would be engaged only with you.[1] Cease, therefore, from this moment and patiently endure the recompenses that come upon you.'

This brother reminded himself of all these things each day, so that whenever a trial or tribulation should assault him, he would be able to bear it with thanksgiving and be profited. May we also be able patiently to endure with gratitude all that comes upon us, and so receive profit with the aid of the grace of God, the Friend of man, to Whom be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

1. I.e. in order to repay you for your evils.

Homily 32

On the power and evil activity of sin, and on what produces it and what causes it to cease

A MAN IS NOT FREED from the pleasure of the working of sin until he truly abhors the cause of sin with his whole heart. This is the fiercest struggle, the struggle that resists a man unto blood, wherein his free will is tested as to the singleness of his love for the virtues. This is the power which some call *enticement* and *pitched battle,* and by the scent of it the wretched soul is enfeebled because of the intense provocation which lies therein. This is the mighty power of sin by which the enemy is wont to trouble the souls of the chaste and to compel the pure movements [*of their souls*] to experience what they had never in any wise experienced. It is here that we manifest our patience, my beloved brethren, our struggle, and our zeal. For this is the time of unseen martyrdom, in which it is said that the monastic order always excels. If the upright mind does not securely guard itself, it will speedily be confounded by its encounter with this warfare.

A Prayer O Lord, the Source of all aid, in these times, the times of martyrdom, Thou art mighty to support the souls of those who with joy have betrothed themselves to Thee, the heavenly Bridegroom, and who consciously have made the vows of holiness with sincere motivations and not from duplicity. Wherefore, grant them power to pull down with boldness the fortified walls and every high thing that exalts itself against the truth, lest they miss their mark by reason of the irresistible and unsupportable violence of that moment when one must struggle unto blood! 2 Cor. 10:4–5

In this time of fierce conflict the struggle is not always over chastity, for abandonment also sometimes occurs for the sake of trial. But woe to the weak man who is tried in this critical conflict! because it gains great strength from the habitual actions of those who have surrendered themselves to defeat by consenting with their thoughts.

Be on your guard against idleness, O beloved, for it conceals a sure death, just as without it a monk cannot fall into the hands of those who strive to enslave him. On that day God will not judge us about psalmody, nor for the neglect of prayer, but because by abandoning them we have opened our door to the demons. Whenever they find room, they enter and close the doors of our inner chambers and of our noetic eyes, and then they accomplish tyrannically and impurely in us that which subjects its perpetrators to divine judgment and most severe punishments. Thus, we become captives because we have forsaken small things which, nevertheless, very wise men deem worthy of attention for Christ's sake. As it is written, he who does not subject his will to God will subject it to his adversary. Hence you should consider these things that seem so small to you to be a bulwark against those who endeavor to take us captive. In the spirit of revelation, these small things have been laid down to be accomplished in our cells for the preservation of our life by wise men who uphold the institutes of the Church, but the unwise consider their omission to be of no consequence. Since they take no account of the ensuing harm, the beginning and middle of their way is unchastised license, the mother of many losses. It is more expedient to strive not to forsake these small matters than to make a place for sin through spacious living; for the end of unseasonable freedom is absolute slavery.

As long as your senses are alive to every occurrence, understand that you are [*spiritually*] dead, for the burning of sin will not be absent from all your members and peace will not be able to settle in your soul. If in such a condition a monk should say in his heart that he is vigilant, then he does not wish to know when he is being slapped. Whoever deceives his companion deserves the curse of the
Lev. 6:2 Law; but when a man deceives himself, what apology will he make? For being conscious of the wickedness of the deed, he feigns ignorance that he does not know it, for which reason he begins to be censured by his conscience. And this he finds troublesome, because he knows that of which he pretends to be ignorant.

On the passions *

How sweet are the origins of the passions! Sometimes a man can
[152] cut off the passions and be at peace because of his distance from them,

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

and he rejoices that they have ceased; he cannot, however, extirpate the causes of the passions. For this reason we are tempted against our will. When it is by the passions, we are grieved; but we cherish their origins and would have them remain in us. We do not desire sin, but we accept with pleasure the causes that bring it upon us. For this reason the second [*that is, the causes*] by their activity become the sources of the first [*that is, sins*].

The man who loves the origins of the passions is an involuntary bondsman, and against his will he is enslaved to the passions. He who hates his sins will cease to sin, and he who confesses them will receive forgiveness. It is impossible for a man to forsake the habit of sin if he does not first acquire a hatred of sin; and it is impossible to receive forgiveness before a confession of iniquities. With the latter, [*that is, confession,*] there is real abasement; and with the former, [*that is, hatred of sin,*] there is remorse arising from shame that cleaves to the heart.

If we do not hate those things which are blameworthy, we cannot smell the stench of their activity; and so long as we carry them in ourselves, we shall not be able to perceive their malodor. Therefore, until you cast away from yourself that which is unseemly, you will not comprehend the disgrace that entangles you, nor the shame that arises from it. But when you see your burden in others, understand the dishonor that covers you. Withdraw from evil, and immediately you will comprehend its malodor. For if you do not withdraw, you will never learn it, nay rather, you will put on its stench like a beautiful fragrance, and you will reckon the nakedness of your shame to be a veil of glory.

Blessed is the man who has withdrawn far from this darkness and sees himself! for within it clear vision and discernment cannot operate. How, indeed, could the beclouded discernment of such a man distinguish what is necessary? Blessed is the man who has put away the heavy-headedness of his intoxication and has understood his own insatiable debauchery by seeing it in others. For then he will know his own shame. But so long as a man carries in himself the drunken debauchery of his sins, everything that he does appears comely in his eyes. For when nature leaves its rightful order, it is no matter whether it be intoxicated with wine or with lusts, for both alike drive it from its proper state, and both produce an identical inflammation in the

body; the means may be different, but the resulting concoction is the same, and the derangement is identical. The different causes are not equal, but in their recipients there is no distinction.

Every rest is followed by hardship, and every hardship endured
[153] for God is followed by rest. Everything that is in this world is subject to change, and furthermore a man undergoes change in contrary ways, whether in this age, or in the age to come, or at the time of his departure; and this is especially true with respect to the pleasure that comes from licentiousness, and the suffering that a man endures for the sake of sanctification and which opposes that pleasure. Now God provides in His compassion that a man will taste this punishment either while he is journeying on the road or when he reaches its end; then, by reason of His rich mercies, a man will pass through punishment as a recompense;[1] but through rest, [*only*] as an earnest,[2] so that the interest on the good [*deeds done*] does not eat away its own capital: but for evil [*deeds*], yes – as it is said: He who is chastised here eats away his own Gehenna.[3]

Beware of the freedom that precedes an evil slavery. Beware of the consolation that precedes warfare. Beware of the knowledge that is acquired before an encounter with temptations; but especially beware of the ardent love that is prior to the completion of repentance. If we are all sinners and no man is superior to the temptations of sin, it is certainly true that no virtue is more pre-eminent than repentance. For a man can never complete the work of repentance. It is always suitable for every sinner and righteous man who wishes to gain salvation. There is no limit to perfection, for even the perfection of the perfect is truly without completion. And for this very reason repentance is bounded neither by periods of time nor by works until a man's death. Remember that every pleasure is followed by disgust and bitterness as inseparable companions.

Beware of joy that does not have conjoined to it the cause of [*its*] change. For you cannot understand the limit and the cause of the

1. I.e. for pleasure. 2. I.e. for suffering endured for sanctification's sake.

3. I.e. God gives us rest here only as an earnest or pledge, lest a recompense received here (the *interest on good deeds done*) leave us no reward to receive in eternity (the *capital*); but in the case of evil deeds, yes, He gives a recompense of punishment here, to reduce or eliminate punishment in eternity.

change of anything that is provided by a hidden dispensation from above. Fear those things that are considered to possess uniformity, for it is said that they are outside the path. He Who knows wisely to steer the raft of the world has conjoined change to everything that is His; and what is outside of this is a shadow.

Relaxation of the members is followed by wandering and confusion of the thoughts; immoderate activity is followed by despondency; and despondency is followed by wandering. But the former wandering differs from the latter wandering. The former originating from relaxation is followed by the warfare of fornication, but the latter originating from despondency is followed by the forsaking of one's solitude and roaming from place to place. Righteous works with moderation and laborious perseverance are beyond price; slackening in them increases lust, but excess, on the other hand, increases confusion. [154]

Patiently endure the folly of your nature which prevails against you, my brother, for you ready yourself to attain the wisdom that holds the everlasting crown of sovereignty. Do not be frightened by the turbulence of your Adamitic body, fashioned to enjoy that delight (the knowledge of which passes the understanding of carnal man) when it will put on the heavenly Image, Who is the King of Peace. Do not be troubled by the change and turbulence of nature, for the hardship caused by this quickly passes from the man who accepts it gladly. The passions are like dogs that are wont to spend their time before the butchers' shops; they run away at the sound of a man's voice, but if they are left unattended, they attack like great lions. Set every small desire at naught, that you may not ponder upon the vehemence of its burning. For patience shown for a short time with respect to small matters disperses the danger of great ones. It is impossible to overcome great evils, if you do not subdue the lesser.

Remember, O brother, the state wherein you will be found, by which mortality is broken and which has no part in life that slowly takes its course and is maintained by means of [*bodily*] humors. In that state there is no warmth of the constitution, which by the enticements of pleasure causes hardship for the infantile nature. Patiently endure the toil of the struggle into which you have been led for trial, that you may receive a crown from God and, having passed away

from this world, you may find rest. Remember also that rest which has no end, that life without enticements, that perfect state, that unchanging mode of life, and that compelling captivity of divine love that dominates nature, of which things may we be deemed worthy by the grace of Christ, to Whom with the unoriginate Father and the All-holy Spirit be glory, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 33*

That in certain conflicts, labor is better than being in danger of falling

It is not possible to vanquish evil thoughts that are joined to bodily enticements, or rather, it is very difficult. They are called by some a two-edged sword used against us. There can be no rest from them as long as there is satiety in bread, water, and sleep, and we have access to things that can provoke us through the senses. Passing away from life would be better than the shame of these things. When we are diligent in that which it befits us to do, the influence of the flesh will abate in our members.

It is not possible both to be solicitous over the things of the senses and to set aright our passions. Without sorrowful supplications and continual prostrations it is impossible to draw God's mercies toward us; and it is necessary for us always to continue practising both one together with the other. Without painstaking in small matters, it is impossible to escape from great evils.

* This homily is found only in Syriac.

Homily 34

On guarding the heart and on subtler divine vision

IF YOU REMAIN ALONE IN YOUR CELL and you have not yet acquired the power of true divine vision, be always constant in your meditation upon the *troparia*, the *kathismata*,[1] the recollection of death, and the hope of things to come. For these collect the mind and do not permit it to roam about, until true divine vision should come; for the power of the spirit is greater than the passions. Meditate upon the hope of things to come, joining this with the recollection of God. Understand well the sense of the *troparia*, and guard yourself from external things that incite you to desire. Keep to the small works that you do in your cell, joining them with the aforementioned, and always examine your thoughts.

If you should find your harbor after the greater part of your servitude (which precedes it by reason of the free will), then grasp it. But if you should see that it[2] leads you to foolish deeds, yoke it to laws, for hereby it can be easily governed. While you are proceeding on your way with the help of understanding amid these and similar variations, voyaging in the ship of your cell loaded with goods – which indeed is a great festival filled with the merchandise of the ascetics – then examine closely the dissimilar offspring that are born to you from perceptible variations. Truly you will see how every spiritual delight is preceded by the afflictions of the cross, and how the pleasure of sin is born of bodily ease. And furthermore you will see why in the harbor of chastity spiritual love is caused by the divine vision of the spirit, which also heals the mind. There is nothing secondary that does not have a proper cause, and there is no tertiary virtue without a preceding one. Thus you will discover that the mind's wings sprout up in the womb of chastity, and that on them the mind ascends to divine love. And it is by love that a man ventures noetically to ap-

1. The Greek translators have rendered the Syriac *spiritual hymns* with specialized forms of hymns used in the daily cycle of services.

2. I.e. the harbor, which is rest from the passions.

proach the dark cloud.[3] This insight will give a man much power to mingle watchfulness with his affairs, and at the same time it will furnish him with the incentives of encouragement. Discipline practised without eyes is done in vain, for it easily brings on despondency on account of distraction. Pray that you may acquire [*vigilant*] eyes in everything you do. From these things joy will begin to gush forth in you, and then you will find tribulations to be sweeter than honey and your mandra[4] to be a wedding chamber.

No man can conquer the passions except by the palpable virtues; and no one can conquer the wandering of the mind except by the study of spiritual knowledge. Our mind is light and swift, and if it is not tied down by some reflection, it never stops wandering. Without attaining perfection in the aforesaid virtues, a man cannot acquire this safeguard. For if a man does not vanquish his enemies, he cannot be at peace. And if peace does not reign, how can a man find those things that are stored up within peace? The passions are a wall impeding the hidden virtues of the soul. If the passions are not first cast down by means of externally manifest virtues, that which lies within cannot be seen; for a man who is outside a wall cannot keep company with what is inside. No man sees the sun in a cloud, nor the natural virtue of the soul in the constant turbulence of the passions.

Entreat God to give you to feel spiritual aspiration and yearning. For whenever this yearning of spirit comes upon you, you will withdraw from the world and the world will withdraw from you. But it is impossible to experience this without stillness, ascetic endeavor, and the converse of reading devoted to the same. Without the latter, do not seek the former;[5] for if you seek after it, it will gradually be altered and become corporeal. Let him who has understanding understand. It was the wise Lord's good pleasure that we should eat this bread with the sweat of our brow. He did not ordain this spitefully, but lest it should oblige us to vomit and we die. For every virtue is the mother of a second. If, then, you abandon the mother which gives birth to the virtues and go out to seek the daughters before you have acquired their mother, those virtues will be vipers to your soul, and if you do not hurl them away from you, speedily you will die.

3. I.e. wherein God resides.

4. I.e. a sheepfold, a cell.

5. I.e. the yearning of the spirit.

Homily 35

On the signs and workings of the love of God

NOW THAT WE HAVE WRITTEN ABOVE[1] about spiritual aspiration and yearning, the time has come to explain it. It is an indistinct power which is stirred in the heart by love, at first without perceptible causes, since it arouses a man's constitution without a real sight of something or active understanding or deliberation. On this account it is thought to have no cause as such, since the mind is still clouded. It is thus to the inexperienced, but to the perfect the cause is revealed afterward. For indeed, with the searching-out of the cause, spiritual yearning becomes much stronger, since sweetness then pervades the heart. Now the heart sends a portion of this sweetness into the body and a portion into the faculties of the soul, because the heart is placed as the mediator between the soul's senses and those of the body: for the former it is so as an instrument, and for the latter naturally. The heart directs the sweet savor of its activity to both. For this reason the world is constrained to depart from the heart when the heart departs from the things of the world. Now it is necessary to investigate the cause of this.

The love of God is fervent by nature, and when it descends upon a man beyond measure, it throws his soul into ecstasy. Therefore the heart of the man who has felt this love cannot contain it or endure it without an unaccustomed change being seen in him according to the measure of the quantity of this love. And these are its visible signs: his face becomes fiery, exceedingly joyous, and his body becomes heated. Fear and shame withdraw from him and he is like one deranged. The power that gathers the mind flees from him and he is as though out of his wits. From henceforth, his life, in comparison with his Beloved, is as nothing in his eyes. Because of this, even death, which is terrible for all, for him is a cause of joy. And further, the gaze of his mind is fixed inseparably and deliriously upon Him. Though

1. I.e. at the end of Homily 34.

he is distant, he speaks with Him as one near at hand. Being hidden from sight, he muses upon His well-known hiddenness. His vision is natural, but inaccessible to sense perception. In his actions, as in his appearance, he is set aflame. He dwells in solitude, but his thinking converses as it were with another and is astonished.

This is the spiritual passion with which the apostles and the martyrs were inebriated. With it the first travelled the world over, toiling and being reviled, while the second, although their members were severed, and although they shed their blood like water and suffered the most dreadful torments, yet they did not grow faint-hearted but endured courageously, and being truly wise, were thought fools. Still others wandered in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth, and amid disorder they were most well-ordered. Being grave, they were unrestrained; being dispassionate, they abode in the flesh; entreating always, they were silent without compulsion. May God grant us also to attain to such derangement! Heb. 11:38

If, before you have entered into the city of humility, you observe in yourself that you have found rest from the importunity of the passions, do not believe it, for this is a trap of the enemy who strives to ensnare you. Nay rather, await the onslaught of great disturbance and turmoil after this period of rest. For until you have passed through all the lodging-places of the virtues, you will not find rest from your toil, nor will you have relief from the enemy's treacherous designs until you reach the lodging-place of holy humility. O God, deem us worthy to reach this by Thy grace! Amen.

Homily 36

On the modes of virtue

ASCETICAL ENDEAVOR is the mother of sanctification. From sanctification the first taste of the perception of Christ's mysteries is born, which is called the first stage of spiritual knowledge. But let no man deceive himself, and imagine divinations;[1] for a polluted soul does not ascend to that pure kingdom either in an allegorical or in a real sense, nor is such a soul joined to the holy spirits.[2] But when the elements [*of the body*] mingle with those that are kindred to them,[3] then in the absence of the natural unity[4] the wretched soul is preserved for the great Judgment to come. Scour the beauty of your chastity with tears and fasting and the stillness of solitude.

Now when the straight course of the natural sphere comes to its end and reaches that great light which nourishes the spheres of the stars – which are manifold in their individual distinctions, as Paul
1 Cor. 15:41 says in his demonstration of the resurrection to come – and when it is joined to the rays of that light (I do not mean in a natural sense), then[5] the chariot of the will will be bound fast with the bonds of unknowing and the two abundantly flowing springs[6] will cease to pour forth their streams. And then the priests[7] will depart from the sanctu-
3 Kgs. 8:11 ary[8] from before the cloud of the glory of the Lord. At that time the king of Israel will be Solomon, that is to say, the peace that is born of humility. He will build a house for the Lord and finish it with the adornment of all the sacred vessels.

A small affliction borne for God's sake is better before God than a great work performed without tribulation; for affliction willingly borne brings to light the proof of love, but a work of leisure proceeds from a self-satisfied conscience. That is why the saints were proved

1. Gk. μαντείας. Here reference is made to the pagan mysteries which claimed initiation into spiritual knowledge.

2. I.e. the angels.

3. I.e. at death and the dissolution of the body.

4. I.e. of the body with the soul.

5. I.e. at the end of time.

6. I.e. the eyes.

7. I.e. prayer. See p. 239 ff.

8. I.e. the heart.

by tribulations for Christ's love, and not by ease. For [*good*] works accomplished without toil are the righteousness of those in the world, who do righteous deeds with their possessions [*but not their bodies*], thus gaining nothing within themselves. But you, O struggler, taste within yourself Christ's suffering, that you may be deemed worthy of tasting His glory. For if we suffer with Him, then we are glorified with Him. The mind is not glorified with Jesus, if the body does not co-suffer for Christ. He, therefore, who holds human glory in contempt, is deemed worthy of the glory of God, and his body is glorified with his soul. For the glory of the body is chastity's submission to God; but the glory of the mind is true divine vision concerning God. True submission is twofold, in works and in revilings; thus, whenever the body suffers, the heart also suffers with it. If you do not know God, the love of Him cannot be stirred within you; and you cannot love God if you do not see Him. The sight of God comes by knowing Him; for the divine vision of Him does not precede the knowledge of Him.

Rom. 8:17

A Prayer Make me worthy, O Lord, to know Thee that I might also love Thee, not with that knowledge which springs from the exercise of study accompanied by dispersion of mind: but make me worthy of that knowledge whereby the mind, in beholding Thee, glorifies Thy nature in divine vision that steals from the mind the awareness of the world. Account me worthy to be lifted above the will's wandering eye which begets imaginings, and to behold Thee in the constraint of the bond of the cross, in the second part of the crucifixion of the mind, whose liberty ceases from the activity of its thoughts by abiding in Thy continuous vision, which surpasses nature. Implant in me the astringent of Thy love, that being drawn away by fervent love for Thee I may come forth from this world. Awake in me understanding of Thy humility, wherewith Thou didst sojourn in the world in the dwelling-place of our members, which Thou didst put on, through the mediation of the holy Virgin, that with this continual and unfailing recollection, I may accept with delight the lowliness of my nature.

There are two parts to the mounting of the Cross: the first, crucifixion of the body; and the second, ascent into divine vision. The first comes by freedom from the passions; and the second takes place by

the operation of the works of the Spirit.[9] Our mind is not brought
[162] into submission unless our body is subject to it. The kingship of the mind is the crucifixion of the body. The mind is not subject to God unless the free will is subject to reason.

It is hard to convey anything sublime to one who is still a beginner, and an infant in stature. 'Woe to thee, O city, when thy king is a
Eccles. 10:16 child!' Whoever subjects himself to God is near to having all things subject to him. When a man knows himself, the knowledge of all things is granted to him, for to know one's self is the fullness of the knowledge of all things.[10] In the submission of your soul all things will be submissive unto you. At the time when humility reigns in your manner of life, your soul will submit herself to you, and along with her, all things will be submitted to you, because the peace of God is born in your heart. But so long as you are outside it, you will be unceasingly persecuted not only by the passions, but also by accidents. Truly, O Lord, if we do not humble ourselves, Thou dost not cease to humble us. Real humility is the fruit of knowledge; and true knowledge, the fruit of trials.

9. Syriac *the first is of free will* [or *freedom*], *and the second is of operation* [lit. *being worked upon*]. The Greek has interpreted the meaning of this. It is probable, however, that *free will,* not *freedom from the passions,* is meant.

10. The Syriac printed text adds here *since, as all things are contained in you, the knowledge of all is contained in the knowledge of yourself.*

Homily 37

A discourse on various subjects in questions and answers, on the trustworthy way of life and every kind of virtue. This discourse will be especially useful for those who have stripped off the world, those who dwell in the desert, those who are recluses, and those who through voluntary mortification look forward to the crown of righteousness

QUESTION What bond restrains a man's mind from running after evil things?

Answer Continually to search after wisdom, and to be insatiate for the doctrine of life; there is no stronger bond for the mind's unruliness than this.

Question Until what limit shall the man run who pursues wisdom, and where is the course of its instruction completed?

Answer The limit of this journey is so truly unattainable that even the saints are found wanting with respect to the perfection of wisdom, because there is no end to wisdom's journey. Wisdom ascends even till this: until she unites with God him who follows after her. And this is a sign that the insights of wisdom have no limit: that wisdom is God Himself.

Question What is the first path and beginning that conducts us to wisdom?

Answer It consists in a man's going in search of God with all his strength, in striving with his whole soul until the end in his pursuit, and in not being negligent when it is necessary for the love of God to strip off and hurl away even his very life.

Question Who is the man that is rightly said to possess understanding?

Answer The man who really understands that there is a limit to this life – and it is he who is able to set a limit to his sins. For what knowledge or understanding is greater than this, that a man should be so wise as to know how to depart from this life without corruption, having no member tainted by the odor of desire nor any spot in his soul

from the sweetness of lust? If a man endeavors to refine his thoughts, so as to enter into the mysteries of all natures, and to become enriched through discovery and progress in every field of knowledge, but his soul is blemished by the stain of sin and he has not acquired hope by his soul's good testimony that he will safely reach the haven of certainty, then there is no man in the world more senseless than he, because his labors have, by their continual pursuit of the world, only brought him to a hope which belongs to this world.

Question Who in truth is very strong?

Answer He who is well-pleased to abide in temporal afflictions, wherein is hidden the glory of his victory, and who has not desired spacious living, which conceals the malodor of shame and gives him who has partaken of it the cup of sighing to drink at all times.

Question Does harm really occur to a man on his Godward journey if he turns aside from his labor?

Answer It is not possible for any man to draw near to Christ without tribulation, and without afflictions his righteousness cannot be preserved unchanged. If he puts an end to the labors that make righteousness increase, he will put an end to that which guards it, and his righteousness will be like an unguarded treasure. And he will be like a gladiator surrounded by enemy ranks and stripped of his weapons, like a ship bereft of its sails and tackle, and like a garden deprived of its source of water.

Question Who is the man that is illumined in his thoughts?

Answer Whoever has attained to a perception of the bitterness that is concealed in the world's sweetness; who has kept his mouth from drinking of this cup; who always seeks how to save his soul; who does not halt in his course until he is released from this world; who shuts the doors of his senses, lest the desire for this life should enter him and steal his hidden treasures from him.

Question What is the world? How can we recognize it? And how does it harm those who love it?

Answer This world is a harlot who, by lust for her beauty, entices those who behold her to love her. The man who in part is possessed by love for the world, and is enmeshed therein, cannot disentangle
[165] himself from her embrace until he divests himself of his own life. When the world has stripped a man of everything and thrust him

from his dwelling in the day of his death, then only will the man understand that she is verily a deceiver and a beguiler. Even when a man strives to come out of the darkness of this world, he will be unable to see her intricate bonds as long as he is still held therein. In this manner the world holds sway not only over her disciples, her children, and those who are held in bondage within her, but also over non-possessors, ascetics, and those who at one time severed her bonds and rose above her. For lo, by multifarious means the world has begun to ensnare them in her works, to trample upon them and put them under her feet.

Question Since you have convinced me that the world truly strangles its inhabitants, and of how difficult it is to comprehend the craftiness of its bonds, firstly I beg to learn what is the origin of the impulse whereby the mind begins to entertain doubts concerning the world, since all its bonds are so sweet, and the form of its shackles is concealed.

Answer When the thought of love for his soul is stirred within a man, the impulse of this thought begins to make the world hateful in his eyes and throws him into doubt concerning it.

Question From whence does he possess this ability to be moved in such a manner, so that what he lauded at all times and always considered beautiful, now suddenly appears disagreeable to him, and he feels remorse over his life and his previous knowledge, as not having thought correctly about the world?

Answer At the first it is nature which imparts to him this discerning impulse, when it silently indicates to him the unstable constitution of the world, the termination of its course, and the ephemeral nature of those who enter it, such that he sees the world to be a mere passageway for those who come into it, and for the many generations that preceded him, the precise number of which is unknown. They entered the world like an inn for the night, and they departed from it never to return, like wayfarers journeying on a path throughout the world. Some of them were kings, some rulers; some were wise, some honored; some were scribes, some orators; some were judges, some generals; some were opulent with riches, some were masters of possessions.

But now, after their passing, there is no more the rank of their po-

sitions, nor the crown of their sovereignty, nor their mighty throne, nor their luxurious delicacies, nor the praise of their flatterers, nor the love of their friends, nor their bodies that were pampered with good things, nor the comely beauty of their elegant manners, nor the proud bearing of their dignity, nor their cultured intellect, nor their mind rich with ideas, nor the plenteous outpouring of the Gihon of their learning which gushed from their mouths and enraptured their hearers by its elegance. Lo, they have slept in Sheol[1] for long years as though it were one night! Nor is it known how long a time yet remains for them to sleep this lengthy sleep, or when the daybreak of the resurrection will dawn for them and awake them from their slumber. And when a man ponders over why they are left in such a state, he is sorely grieved. 'Lo, how many unknown generations,' he thinks, 'are enclosed under the earth, and I also shall pass away as one of them. Accursed be riches and comfort!'

Gen. 2:13; 2 Chron. 32:30

[166]

While deliberating thus, great dismay falls upon his heart and his mind is filled with anguish. And from the oppression of his anguish he sends down tears in great sorrow. Then he will despise the world, mourn over his life, and bewail his soul with manifold and bitter lamentations. With sighs he will say to himself, 'Where are you now, my wretched soul, and where will you be found after my death?' And perhaps even this reflection will arise in him: 'Would that I had not entered this creation and come forth from my mother's womb!' In such lamentation he will shed sweet tears from the sighing of his heart and soak his garments with his weeping. Thereupon this world will be like a prison in his eyes, and its former sweetness will be the bitterest of all things. The love of its life and its desirable beauty will be to him like a figure of Sheol.

Job 3:10, 11

Then his mind will turn to Scripture, which rouses in him faith in the resurrection and the end of all things in this world, and in the promises set down in Scripture for those who have lived well in this world, and he considers the divine judgments which menace transgressors of the Law and those who have been pleased to walk on the broad way of sin during their short lifetimes. Then straightway, like

1. The realm of the dead. Originally this word referred to the grave, the place of the body, but later it came to refer to the place of souls. For this reason Sheol (or Hades) is often figuratively said to be under the earth.

a man who has encountered the light, he casts off the oppression of his sorrow and great joy stirs within him, as in a man who has found true and excellent hope. These things and their like a man's nature is unable to make manifest from its own activity, but by faith alone they are understood from the indications of Scripture. For a man cannot gain instruction concerning himself wholly from his nature and the discerning impulses that arise in him, but we can learn about the future and past acts of God's providence only from the Scriptures, or from the revelation of the Spirit. Therefore the eye of a man's mind will be enlightened by means of the rays of faith and the Scriptures, and nature's faculty of discernment will shine, and he will be awakened to care for his soul. Thereafter he will devise means to set his life free from the world, so that, before departing from the body, he might prepare provisions that will avail him yonder.

Question How can a man depart completely from this world?

Answer By the yearning inspired from recollection of the good things to come, which the divine Scriptures sow in his heart with the sweetness of their sayings filled with hope. For unless a man counters [167] the things that are considered to be glorious and delectable – wherein he is held fast – with the desire for better things, he will be unable to despise his former love.

Question Lo, nature is feeble and cannot suddenly renounce its former habits and embrace a life of afflictions!

Answer Unless, with much wisdom, a man compares in his mind the greatness of the life to come with the brevity of the sorrow of this short life, he will not be able to take such courage as to dare to endure afflictions, so that he might set out on his journey on the path to the new world. I entreat you, reckon up in your mind the number of the years of this place wherein we dwell, then elevate yourself as much as possible, and compare this number with the days of the world to come, and see whether the number of what you give will amount to the number of what you will receive in return. And consider whether you will make an equal exchange in what you will give up with what you will receive in return. Therefore the wise man, being astonished at the greatness of that world and the infinite life there, as compared with the brevity of this life here, will say, 'The number of a man's days, if he lives long, are a hundred years, and this is like filling a Ps. 89:10

bucket from the sea or taking up a grain of sand. But a thousand years in this world are not even like unto one day in the world of the right-
Ps. 83:10 eous.'

Question What should we do with our body when pain and heaviness encompass it, for together with the body the will is enfeebled in its aspiration for the good and loses its first strength?

Answer It is often the case with some, that half their soul goes out in pursuit of the Lord and half remains in the world, and so their heart is not severed from things here, but they are divided within themselves, and sometimes they look ahead, sometimes backward. I am of the opinion that the sage exhorted such divided men as these, who draw near to the way of God, with the words: 'Come not unto
Ecclus. 1:28 the Lord with double hearts,' but come unto His way as one who sows and as one who reaps. And our Lord also, seeing that among those who wish to make a total renunciation, there are some whose wills are prepared to do so, but whose thoughts turn back by reason of the fear of tribulations and because they have not yet cast away the love of the flesh from themselves, uttered this definitive word to them, wishing to disperse the sluggishness of their minds: 'If any
Matt. 16:24 man will come after Me, let him deny himself,' and so on.

Question But what is it to deny oneself?

[168] *Answer* It is denial of the flesh. Just as a man who is prepared to be crucified has only the thought of death in his mind, and he goes forth not supposing anymore to possess a share of the life of this present age, even so is the man who wishes to fulfill the Lord's word. And
Ibid. this is the meaning of 'take up his cross and follow Me.'

For the cross is a volition that is ready for every affliction. And when He wished to teach us why this is so, He said, 'He that wishes to live in this world, shall cause himself to perish from the true life;
Matt. 10:39; 16:25 and he that makes himself to perish here, shall find himself there.' That is to say, the man who walks on the path of the cross and has set his footsteps therein, but once more takes concern for this life, has caused himself to perish from the hope for the sake of which he went forth to suffer tribulation. Not only does this concern prevent him from drawing near to affliction for God's sake, but by his involvement with it, it gradually draws him away and carries him out of the

midst of the struggle for the life of blessedness; and this thought grows stronger in him until it conquers him.

But he who consents in his mind to lose himself for the sake of finding Christ's love, will be without reproach and preserved unharmed for life everlasting. And this is the meaning of, 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' 'Therefore, even now, of your own accord, prepare your soul for complete dissolution from this life. And if loss of this life should overtake you while you are found in such a state of mind, I will give unto you eternal life, even as I have promised you. If you remain in this life, I will show you here My promise in very deed and the confirmation of the future blessings.' Matt. 10:39 John 10:28

You will find eternal life when you have despised this life. When you enter into the struggle with this preparation, then all things that are thought to be painful and grievous will be as nothing in your eyes. For when the mind has been thus prepared, it has no struggle or affliction in the moment of the peril of death. For this reason we must know with all exactness that if a man does not hate his life in this world because of his desire for the blessed life to come, he will in no wise be able to bear the manifold tribulations and pains which come upon him at every hour.

Question By what means can a man cut off his former habits and accustom himself to the life of poverty and asceticism?

Answer The body cannot be persuaded to live in privation so long as it is surrounded by the causes of pleasure and slackness. And the mind cannot restrain it from these until it estranges the body from everything that produces slackness. For when the body beholds the sight of luxury and worldly things and nearly every hour sees the causes of laxity, a burning desire for them is enkindled in it. Therefore the Lord Redeemer very rightly commanded whoever would follow Him to strip himself and leave the world; for a man ought first to cast off from himself the causes of slackness, and then approach the work. When the Lord Himself began to wage war with the devil, He fought him in the arid desert. Paul also exhorts those who take up the cross of Christ to go forth from the city, saying: 'Let us go forth unto Him without the city and take up His reproach, for He suffered without the city.' For by setting himself apart from the world and [169] Matt. 4:1 Heb. 13:12

what pertains to it, a man speedily forgets his former habits and his mode of life and he will not struggle long with these. But if he should draw near to the world and its possessions, he will speedily enfeeble the strength of his mind.

Wherefore one must know that separation from the world greatly aids a man and guides him on the way of progress in the fierce and saving struggle. It is proper, then, and helpful in this struggle, if a monk's cell be in a poor and mean condition, and if his cell be empty and devoid of everything that could incite in him the desire of ease. For when the causes of slackness are distant from a man, he is not endangered by the twofold warfare, that is, the one which is both inward and outward. See how much easier is the struggle when a man desires things that are afar off than when the very things themselves are close at hand and by their sight inflame the thoughts; for the struggle in the latter case is twofold.

When the circumstance of a man is such that he is even in want of a dwelling and his needs are mean and contemptible, then not even when he obtains his need will he look upon it with desire. He will be able to persuade his body to be content with little, and even this he will easily despise; and he does not approach food on account of its delectability, but in order to aid and fortify his nature. Such external causes swiftly make a man engage in asceticism with a mind that is untouched by any affliction or sorrow.

Therefore it is meet for the zealous monk to flee with a nimble foot from everything that causes him warfare, and not to associate with that which fights against him, but to restrain himself from the mere sight of it and to make himself distant from its proximity in so far as he is able. I do not say this with respect to the belly alone, but of anything which by its trial and warfare tempts and tries a monk's freedom. For when a man comes unto God, he makes a covenant with God to separate himself from these things. And these are the things I mean: not to look upon the face of a woman; not to look upon magnificent persons; to have no desire of anything nor to luxuriate; not to look upon elegant clothing; not to behold the society of men of the world, nor to hear their words, nor to enquire concerning them. For the passions are greatly strengthened by the proximity of any of these
[170] things which make an ascetic grow slack and alter his understanding

and his purpose. If it is true that the sight of what is good and beautiful spurs on the volition of the man who is truly zealous to undertake labor on its account, it is evident that what is opposed to the good has also the power to take a man's mind captive. And if nothing more befalls the mind that practises stillness than that it gives itself over to the struggle of warfare, even this is a great injury; for the man who voluntarily casts himself from a peaceful state into turbulence suffers a great loss.

If one of the elders among the ascetics and strugglers reckoned it injurious to his thought and harmful to his struggle to see a beardless youth having the resemblance of a woman, who can afford to be heedless in other matters? For once this saint refused to enter a monastery and greet the brethren, because the wise elder reasoned in this manner: 'If during this night I merely reflect that there is such a person in this place, it will be a great harm to me.' Therefore he did not go in and he said to the brethren, 'I do not fear, my children, but why should I bring warfare upon myself for no reason?'[2] The memory of things such as these produces unprofitable turmoil in the mind. In all things that pertain to the body a man has warfare, and against it he must guard himself. By keeping distant from them he lessens his warfare against them. But whenever they are near at hand, then although he constrains himself to pursue the good, he is endangered by constantly seeing and desiring them.

We know that in the summer there are many medicinal herbs which lie concealed in the ground because of the heat and no one can see them; but when they are moistened by rain and they smell the potency of the air's coolness, each species reveals where it was hidden in the earth. So also a man is truly at rest from many passions when he is in the grace of stillness and in the heat of abstinence; if, however, he encounters the things of this world, he sees how each passion awakens and lifts up its head, especially if they smell the scent of repose.

I have said this lest any grow confident so long as he lives in this body, even until he dies, and in order to show that flight and making oneself distant from the causes of evil is a great and excellent help in the ascetic struggle. We must always fear whatever produces shame

2. Abba Abraham. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 128, #569.

in us by its recollection, and we must never trample upon and scorn our conscience. Let us therefore put our body to the test in a desolate place bereft of the causes [*of warfare*] and make it acquire patient endurance. But that which is greater than all is for a man, wherever he
[171] should be, to strive to be far removed from the cause of warfare. For although a man might suffer affliction in his mind, yet he will have no fear of suffering a fall due to his proximity [*to things*] when, being confronted by a need, he is defeated by his thoughts.

Question When a man has cast off from himself every hindrance and has entered into the struggle, what is the beginning of his war against sin and where does he start his fight?

Answer This much is known to everyone, that the labor of vigil and fasting is the beginning of every struggle against sin and lust, and especially for the man who contends against the sin that lies within us. In those who wage this invisible war the sign of hatred of sin and of its desire is to be seen in the fact that they begin to fast, and afterward night-vigil works with fasting to establish their asceticism.

On fasting and vigil

The man who loves the conversation of this yoke-mate fasting his whole life long is a friend of chastity. Just as the satisfaction of the belly is the source of all evils, and as the slackness of sleep kindles the lust of fornication, so fasting, vigil, and wakefulness in God's service by resisting the sweetness of sleep through crucifying the body throughout the day and night, are God's holy pathway and the foundation of every virtue.

Fasting is the champion of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle, the crown of the abstinent, the beauty of virginity and holiness, the resplendence of chastity, the commencement of the path of Christianity, the mother of prayer, the well-spring of sobriety and prudence, the teacher of stillness, and the precursor of all good works. Just as the enjoyment of light is coupled with healthy eyes, so desire for prayer accompanies fasting that is practised with discernment.

When a man begins to fast, he straightway yearns in his mind to enter into converse with God. For the body that fasts cannot endure to sleep upon its pallet all the night through. Fasting naturally incites

wakefulness unto God, not only during the day, but also at night. For the empty body of a faster is not greatly wearied by the battle against sleep. And even if his senses are weakened, his mind is wakeful unto God in prayer. It is better for a man to desist from his liturgy because of weakness due to fasting, than because of sloth due to eating.

When the seal of fasting is set upon a man's lips, his thought reflects with compunction, his heart pours forth prayer, gloom lies upon his countenance, shameful thoughts are far removed from him, cheer cannot be detected in his eyes, and he is an enemy of lusts and [172] vain conversations. No one has ever seen a discerning faster enslaved by evil desires.

Fasting with discernment is a spacious mansion for every good thing; but he who neglects fasting makes every good totter. For fasting was the commandment that was given to our nature in the beginning to protect it with respect to the tasting of food, and it was from this that the first of our line fell away. There, however, where the first defeat was suffered, the ascetic strugglers make their beginning in the fear of God as they start to keep His laws.

And the Saviour also, when He manifested Himself to the world in the Jordan, began with this. For after His baptism the Spirit led Him into the wilderness and He fasted for forty days and forty nights. Matt. 4:1–2 Likewise all who set out to follow in His footsteps make the beginning of their struggle upon this foundation.

For this is a weapon forged by God, and who shall escape blame if he neglects it? And if the Lawgiver Himself fasts, who among those who keep the law has no need of fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil had never experienced defeat from our nature; but this weapon has made him powerless from the outset. Our Lord was the first-born Leader of victory, that He might set the first crown of victory upon the head of our nature. When the devil, that foe and tyrant, sees a man bearing this weapon, he is straightway frightened and he recollects and considers that defeat which he suffered in the wilderness at the hands of the Saviour; at once his strength is shattered and the very sight of this weapon, given us by our Commander-in-chief, burns him. What weapon is more powerful, and gives more boldness to the heart in the time of battle against the spirits of wickedness, than hunger endured for

Christ's sake? For the more the body toils and endures hardship when the phalanx of the demons encompasses a man, the more his heart is given succor by [*the power of*] confidence. He who has armed himself with the weapon of fasting is afire with zeal at all times.

Elias the zealot also pursued the work of fasting when he was zealous for God's law. He took this labor upon himself: for forty days his mouth abstained from food in the long journey he made on foot. For fasting reminds the faster of the commandments of the Spirit, and it is an intermediary between the old Law and the grace given us by Christ. He who is negligent with respect to fasting is slothful, heedless, and feeble in the other ascetical struggles as well, and he manifests an inception and an evil token of slackness in his soul, thus giving his antagonist an opportunity for defeating him. It is evident that he who enters naked and unarmed into the struggle will retreat from it without gaining the victory; for his limbs were not shielded with the warmth of the hunger that comes of fasting. Such is the nature of fasting, that whoever perseveres in it will possess an unshakeable mind, one ready to encounter and repel all the troublesome passions.

[173] It is said concerning many of the martyrs, that when they foreknew, either by revelation or by information received from one of their friends, the day on which they were to receive the crown of martyrdom, they did not taste anything the preceding night, but from evening till morning they stood keeping vigil in prayer, glorifying God in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, and they looked forward to that hour with joy and exultation, waiting to meet the sword in their fast as those prepared for nuptials. Therefore let us also be vigilant, we who are called to an unseen martyrdom so as to receive the crowns of sanctification, so that we may never give our enemies a sign of denial with any member or part of our body, but having our senses without and our thoughts within clothed with the whole armor of God, let us strenuously take this crown and enter into His glory with the holy martyrs, and stir our foes with astonishment; for, 'Nobody receives the crown without labor,' as the teacher the great Basil said; for it is clearly very absurd, if merchants do not bring back riches without labor and dangerous tempests, that a righteous man should expect the recompense of the crown without trouble and without labor for righteousness' sake.

Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16

Eph. 6:11, 13

Question How is it that many who, perhaps, practise these works, do not sense tranquillity from passions and peace from thoughts?

Answer Bodily labors alone, my brother, do not quell the passions that are hidden in the soul, nor do they prevent thoughts from being continually awakened by the senses. For these labors protect a man from lusts, lest he be vanquished by them, and from the delusion of the demons, but they do not give the soul peace and tranquillity. Works and labors give the soul dispassion, mortify the members which are upon the earth, and grant rest from thoughts only when we Col. 3:5 partake of stillness, and the outer senses cease to be disquieted and continue for a long time in the service of wisdom. For until a man is freed from encounters with men, and his members are liberated from the dispersion of thoughts, and he gathers himself into himself, he will never be able to recognize his passion. Stillness, as Saint Basil says, is the beginning of the soul's purification.[3] For when the outward members cease from their outward activity and from the distraction caused thereby, then the mind turns away from distractions and wandering thoughts that are outside its realm and abides quietly within itself, and the heart awakens for the searching-out of deliberations that are within the soul. If a man perseveres well in this, he will begin gradually to make his way into pureness of soul.

Question Is it really impossible for the soul to be purified while engaged with affairs outside the doors [*of the cell*]?

Answer Will a tree that is watered daily ever dry up by the roots? Will the contents of a vessel that is filled daily ever diminish? And if purity is nothing else save forgetting an unfree mode of life and departing from its habits, how and when will the man purify his soul who, actively of himself or through others, renews in himself the memory of his former habits (which is the knowledge of vice) by means of the senses? When can he cleanse his soul from this? Or [174] when will he have rest from the battles that assail him from without, so as to be able to see what lies within and establish peace? If the heart is defiled daily, when will it be cleansed from defilement? But if he cannot even withstand the action [*upon him*] of outward things, how much less will he be able to purify his heart, seeing that he stands in the midst of the camp and every day hears urgent tidings of war?

3. Letter 2, *To Gregory*. *PG* 32.228A

And how could he dare proclaim peace to his soul? If, however, he should withdraw from this, little by little he will be able to make the first inner turmoils cease. For until the upper portion of a river is dammed, its lower waters will not dry up. Only when a man enters stillness can his soul distinguish the passions and prudently search out her own wisdom. Then the inner man also awakens for spiritual work, and day by day he perceives the hidden wisdom flourishing in his soul.

Question What are the exact tokens and accurate signs that the fruit that is hidden in the soul has begun to appear from a man's labor?

Answer When a man is deemed worthy to receive the gift of abundant tears that come over him without effort. For tears are established for the mind as a kind of boundary between what is bodily and what is spiritual, and between passionateness and purity. Until a man receives this gift, the activity of his work is still in the outer man and he has not yet at all perceived the activity of the hidden things of the spiritual man. But when a man begins to relinquish the corporeal things of the present age and crosses this boundary to that which lies inside of visible nature, then straightway he will attain to the grace of tears. And from the first hospice of this hidden discipline, tears begin to flow, and they lead a man to perfection in the love of God. The more he progresses in this discipline, the more he is enriched with love, until by reason of his constant converse with tears he imbibes them with his food and drink.

This, therefore, is the exact sign that the mind has left this world and perceived that spiritual world. But the more a man draws near in his mind to the present world, the more tears subside. And when his mind is totally enmeshed in the world, a man is totally deprived of these tears. This is a sign that a man is completely buried in the passions.

On the difference in tears

There are tears that burn, and there are tears that anoint as if with oil. All tears that flow out of contrition and anguish of heart on ac-
[175] count of sins dry up and burn the body, and often even the governing faculty feels the injury caused by their outflow. At first a man must

necessarily come to this order of tears, and through them a door is opened unto him to enter into the second order, which is superior to the first; this is the sign that a man has received mercy. These are the tears that are shed because of insight; they make the body comely and anoint it as if with oil, and they pour forth by themselves without compulsion. Not only do they anoint the body as with oil, but they also alter a man's countenance. 'When the heart rejoiceth,' it is said, 'the countenance gloweth, but when it is in sorrows, the countenance is downcast.' While the thinking is silent these tears are poured forth over the entire countenance. The body receives from them a sort of nourishment, and gladness is imprinted upon the face. He who has had experience of these two alterations will understand.

Prov. 15:13

Question What is the resurrection of the soul, of which the Apostle speaks, saying, 'If ye be risen with Christ'?

Col. 3:1

Answer When the Apostle said, 'God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts' the resurrection, he showed this resurrection to be the exodus from the old state, which in the likeness of Sheol incarcerates a man so that the light of the Gospel will not shine mystically upon him. This is a breath of life through hope in the resurrection, and by it the dawning of divine wisdom shines in his heart, so that a man should become new, having nothing of the old man. This the prophet also says, 'And I shall give them a new heart and a new spirit.' Then the image of Christ is formed in us through the Spirit of wisdom and the revelation of the knowledge of Him.

2 Cor. 4:6

Ezek. 36:26

Question What, in brief, is the power of the work of stillness?

Answer Stillness mortifies the outward senses and resurrects the inward movements, whereas an outward manner of life does the opposite, that is, it resurrects the outward senses and deadens the inward movements.

Question What is the cause of visions and revelations? For some men see them, but in others who labor more than the former, vision is not so active.

Answer There are many causes of visions and revelations. Some have the divine economy and the common profit of all as their cause; others come to pass for the comfort, encouragement, and instruction of the weak. But chiefly, all visions and revelations are providentially

bestowed through God's mercy for men, and for the most part they are granted to men of three classes: to the very simple and surpass-
[176] ingly guileless; to certain perfect and holy men; and to those who have flaming zeal for God, who have despaired of the world and completely renounced it, who have withdrawn from the habitations of men and gone out naked in pursuit of God, expecting no help from anything visible, and at a time when fear has overcome them because of their solitary existence, or when peril of death from starvation or disease or some dire circumstance and tribulation encompasses them, such that they come near to losing hope. Now the first cause that such consolations are granted to some men of this sort, but are not granted to others who surpass them in labors, is purity or non-purity – of the conscience, I mean. The second cause is precisely this: inasmuch as a man enjoys consolation from men or from anything visible, the consolation of visions and revelations is not granted to him, save for the sake of God's universal providence. Our discourse, however, is concerning anchorites. A witness of what has been said is one of the fathers who made entreaty concerning this matter and heard, 'The consolation and the converse of men suffice you.'

And another witness to this is he who led a solitary life in reclusion, who, when he lived in withdrawal from men, enjoyed at every hour consolation bestowed by divine grace; but when he drew near to the world, he sought for this consolation as was his custom and did not find it. He therefore entreated God to reveal the cause of this, saying, 'Is it not, O Lord, because of the episcopacy that grace has departed from me?' And he was told, 'No, but because God makes special providence for those who live in the desert and vouchsafes them these consolations.'[4] For it is impossible that any man should both enjoy consolation from visible things and receive this consolation of grace, unless it be on account of a hidden divine economy (one of those mentioned above) understood only by Him Who dispenses such things.

Question Are vision and revelation the same, or different?

Answer No, they are different. Revelation is often said with respect

4. Abba Apos (or Apfi), Bishop of Oxyrhyncus. Budge, *PHF*, Vol. II, p. 9, #24. In the Syriac the answer given to Abba Apos is *No, but yonder was the desert, and God provided for you.*

to the two, because what is hidden is revealed and something once hidden now becomes manifest by some means. Not every revelation is a vision, but every vision is called a revelation, because what is hidden is revealed. Still, not all becomes revealed and known through a vision. Revelation is received for the most part concerning things that are known, tasted, and perceived by the understanding. But vision comes to pass in many ways, as it were in a likeness and in types, even as it was given in olden times to the ancients, whether in deep sleep or waking. Sometimes it was precise, sometimes as though in an apparition and somewhat obscurely. For often the very man who beholds the vision does not know whether he is awake or asleep. And even after he comes to himself, he does not know whether the thing had truly taken place or whether it occurred as though in a dream. It also happens that a voice of succor is heard, at times a certain form is [177] seen, at times a more distinct vision, that is, face to face, and sight, and speech, and questions and the ensuing intercourse. And holy powers are also beheld by the worthy and bring revelations to pass. These things occur in desert wildernesses and places far removed from men, where a man is by necessity in great need of them because he has no help or comfort from any quarter. But the revelations that are perceived by the mind are received through its purity, and only by men perfect and replete with knowledge.

Question What is the sign that a man has attained to purity of heart, and when does a man know that his heart has entered into purity?

Answer When he sees all men as good and none appears to him to be unclean and defiled, then in very truth his heart is pure. For how could anyone fulfill the word of the Apostle, that 'A man should esteem all better than himself' with a sincere heart, if he does not attain Phil. 2:3 to the saying, 'A good eye will not see evil'? Hab. 1:13

Question What is purity and where is its boundary?

Answer Purity is the forgetting of the contranatural modes of knowledge which are invented in the world by [*human*] nature. And its boundary is when a man is liberated from, and found outside of, these modes of knowledge, and he enters into the primordial simplicity and guilelessness of his nature and becomes like an infant without, however, the deficiencies of an infant.

Question Is it possible for a man to enter this order?

Answer Yes. For behold, some have reached this measure, as Abba Sisoës, who used to ask his disciple whether he had eaten bread or not. And another of the Fathers entered such a nearly infantile simplicity and innocency, that having so completely forgotten the things of this age, he would have eaten before receiving Holy Communion, had not his disciple hindered him; and his disciple led him like a babe to receive Communion, so limpidly pure and simple was that blessed man. To this world he was an infant, but his soul was perfect before God.[5]

Question What meditation and occupation should the ascetic have while he abides in stillness in his secluded cell, so that his mind should not be engaged with vain thoughts?

Answer You ask, with respect to meditation and occupation, how a man can become dead in his cell? In truth, what need has a zealous man, who soberly attends to his soul, to ask how to pass his time when he is by himself? What meditation can a monk have in his cell save weeping? Could he have any time free from weeping so as to turn his gaze to another thought? And what occupation is better than
[178] this? A monk's very cell and his solitude, which have a likeness to life in a tomb, far from human joys, teach him that his work is to mourn. And the very calling of his name urges and spurs him on to this, because he is called 'the mourner,'[6] that is, bitter in heart.

All the saints have left this life in mourning. If, therefore, all the saints mourned and their eyes were ever filled with tears till they departed from this life, who would have no need of weeping? A monk's consolation is born of his weeping. And if the perfect and the victorious wept here, how could a man covered with wounds endure to abstain from weeping? He whose loved one lies dead before him and who sees himself dead in sins, has he need of instruction concerning the thought he should employ for tears? Your soul, slain by sins, lies before you, your soul which is of greater value to you than the whole world. Could there be no need for you to weep over her? If, therefore, we enter stillness and patiently persevere therein, we shall certainly be able to be constant in weeping. So let us entreat the Lord with an unrelenting mind to grant us mourning. For if we are granted

5. Budge, *PHF*, Vol. II, p. 22, #98; p. 310, #643. 6. The Syriac *abila* means this.

this free grace, which is more excellent and surpasses every other gift, then with its help we shall enter into purity. And once we have come into purity, it will not be taken from us until our departure from this life.

Blessed, therefore, are the pure in heart, for there is no time when they do not enjoy the sweetness of tears, and in this sweetness they see the Lord at all times. While tears are still wet in their eyes, they are deemed worthy of beholding His revelations at the height of their prayer; and they make no prayer without tears. This is the meaning of the Lord's saying, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' For a man comes from mourning into purity of soul. But Matt. 5:4
when the Lord said that they will be comforted, He did not explain what sort of comfort. When by means of tears a monk is deemed worthy of traversing the land of the passions and of reaching the plains of purity of soul, then he encounters there consolation which does not pass away from those who have found it, and he comes upon consolation that is not to be discovered in this world. Then he understands what consolation is received through purity at the completion of mourning, when God wills to give it to those who weep. For it is not possible that a man who continually mourns and weeps should be disquieted by the passions, since the gift of weeping and mourning belongs to the dispassionate. And if the tears of a man who for a long time weeps and mourns can not only lead him to dispassion, but even completely cleanse and free his mind of the memory of the passions, what can we say of those who night and day devote themselves to this activity? No one, therefore, accurately knows the help that comes of weeping, save those only who have surrendered their souls to this work. All the saints strive to reach this entrance-way, because by means of tears the door is opened before them to enter the land of [179]
consolation, wherein the good and saving footsteps of God are imprinted through revelations.

Question Because some are unable to mourn unceasingly by reason of the feebleness of their body, what should they do to safeguard their mind, lest when it is idle, the passions should rise up against it?

Answer When an ascetic's heart is cut off from the affairs of life by his solitary dwelling, far distant from every distraction, the passions cannot rise up against his soul and trouble him, unless he should

grow slothful and neglect his duties. And he will certainly remain unvexed by the passions if he passes his time in the study of the divine Scriptures, seeking out their meanings. For vain thoughts hastily flee from him because of the understanding of the divine Scriptures which grows and abides in him, and his mind is not able to separate itself from its yearning and recollection of the Scriptures, nor will it be able to give any attention whatever to this life by reason of the great sweetness of its reflection, whereby it is exalted in the ascetic's profound stillness in the desert. Wherefore he even forgets himself and his nature, he becomes like a man in ecstasy, who has no recollection at all of this age. With special diligence he ponders and reflects upon what pertains to God's majesty and he says, 'Glory be to His Divinity!' And again, 'Glory be to His wondrous acts! Strange and marvellous are all His works! To what heights has He exalted my worthlessness, on what things has He deemed me worthy to meditate, what thoughts to dare to entertain, wherein my soul may take delight!' And so the ascetic, being engrossed in these marvels and continually struck with wonder, is always drunken, and he lives as it were in the life after the resurrection.

This grace is very greatly aided by stillness, because the mind of the solitary finds therein a place to remain with itself in the peace that stillness endows. Furthermore, his mind is moved to the recollection of that which accords with his manner of life. For, setting before his mind the glory of the age to come, the hope laid up for the righteous in that spiritual life originating in God, and that new restoration, he neither reflects upon nor remembers what pertains to this world. And when he becomes intoxicated with these things, he is once again translated from thence hither by his divine vision concerning this age in which he still abides and he says, stricken with astonishment: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom, knowledge, insight, prudence, and dispensation of the inscrutable God! How unsearchable are His
Rom. 11:33 judgments, and His ways past finding out!'

For when He made ready that other wondrous age, so as to bring therein all rational creatures and to keep them in that infinite life,
[180] what indeed was the cause for Him to fashion this world first, to extend its borders, to enrich it with such a multiplicity and abundance of species and natures, and to place in it the causes, materials, and

conflicts of the many passions? And how was it that in the beginning He set us in this world and instilled in us a love for longevity here, and then He suddenly translates us from hence by death and keeps us for no small time in insensibility and motionlessness? How is it that He thus causes our form to perish, pours out our constitution and mingles it with the earth, permits our structure to dissolve, perish, and melt away, until the human frame completely ceases to be? And then at a time which He wills and has decreed by His adorable wisdom, He will raise us up in another form, which He Himself knows, and will bring us into another state.

And we men are not alone in our hope for these things, but the holy angels, who have no need of this world by reason of their wondrous nature and are but a little short of perfection, also await our resurrection from corruption, when our race will rise out of the dust and its corruptible nature will be made anew. For it is because of us that they are prevented from entering, and they await that opening of the door of the new age which will occur once only. 'This creation,' that is to say, the angels, 'groaneth' with us from the oppressiveness of the body which it sees weighing upon us, and the Apostle says: 'This creation waiteth for the manifestation of the children of God, so as to be delivered from the bondage of corruption in the liberty of the glory of the children of God,' after the total dissolution of this age from its entire constitution and the restitution of our nature to its primordial state.

Rom. 8:22

Rom. 8:19, 21

And then from this he is raised up in his mind to that which was before the foundation of the world, when there was no created thing, neither heaven, nor earth, neither angels, nor anything which has now come into being. He considers how the Lord brought all things suddenly from nothing into being simply by being well-pleased to do so, and how everything as it is brought to perfection stands before Him. Then once more he descends in mind to all God's creations, and he carefully surveys the wonders of His creatures and the wisdom of His works, and he says to himself in awestruck astonishment: 'O the wonder, how greatly His dispensation and His providence transcend every conception, how wonderful and mighty is the power of His creative works! How did He bring creation, that innumerable multitude of diverse creatures, out of non-being into being? And how will

He again cause creation to perish from its wondrous harmony, the beauty of natures and the well-ordered course of its creatures: times and seasons, the union of night and day, the beneficial changes of the year, the many-hued flowers of the earth, the beautiful buildings of the cities, their magnificent palaces, the swift course of men and their
[181] nature which endures hardship from its beginning in life till its departure? How will He suddenly abolish this wondrous order and establish another age, wherein the memory of the former creation will
Isa. 65:17 never again enter into the heart of any man, but a change of another sort will come to pass, and other deliberations, other concerns?'

Then human nature will in no wise remember the world or the way of life which was therein. For the mind of man will be held in bondage by the vision of that state and it will never again have time to turn back in recollection to the conflict with flesh and blood. At the destruction of that former age, the future age will commence straightway. Then each man will say: 'O mother, forgotten of thy children, whom thou didst bear and nurture and madest wise, who in the twinkling of an eye were gathered into a stranger's bosom and became genuine sons of her who was barren and never gave birth! "Rejoice,
Isa. 54:1 thou barren that bearest not," yea, in the children which the earth hath borne unto thee!'

Then he muses as in ecstasy and says: 'How long will this age continue? When will the future age commence? How long will these tabernacles[7] sleep in this state and our bodies be mingled with earth? How will that mode of life come to be? In what form will this nature be resurrected and framed? In what manner will it undergo a second creation?' And musing upon such things and their like, ecstasy, awestruck wonder, and a still silence overcome him, whereupon he stands up, then bends his knees, and with many tears offers up thanksgiving and glorification to the God Who alone is wise, Who is ever glorified in His works which are surpassingly wise.

Blessed, therefore, is the man who has been deemed worthy of such things! Blessed is the man whose meditation this is both day and night! Blessed is the man who dwells upon these things and their like all the days of his life!

To be thus minded is useful for every man, but especially so for the

7. I.e. our bodies.

hesychast, and it is fitting that he be continually reflecting upon these recollections at all times. A man must lay hold of these indications with his thoughts and, having finished prayer, he should ruminate and meditate upon them. When he is engaged in these occupations and this reflection, there will be no place in his mind for a foreign memory that could remove him from his continuous memory of God.

But if in the beginning of his life of stillness a man does not experience the power of such divine visions because of his mind's distraction, and he cannot yet raise himself up toward the power of the aforesaid wonders of God, let him not become despondent and abandon the serenity of his quiet life. For when the husbandman is sowing the earth he does not immediately see the ear as he sows the seed; for [182] despondency, hardship, painful limbs, cutting-off of friendships, and separation from acquaintances accompany the work of sowing. But after a man has endured these things, another season comes wherein the husbandman is filled with gladness, leaps, exults, and rejoices. And when is this? When he eats the bread furnished by his own sweat, and his meditation is held fast in stillness. For stillness and the aforesaid patient meditation enjoyed therein kindle great and endless sweetness in the heart and swiftly draw the mind to unspeakable astonishment. Blessed is the man who perseveres in stillness, for before him is opened access to this divinely flowing spring; he has drunk from it and been sweetened, and without cease he will drink therefrom, always and at every hour of the night and day, until the completion and the end of this, his temporal life.

Question What embraces all the labors of this work, that is to say, stillness, so that when a man has attained it, he can know that he has reached perfection in his manner of life?

Answer When a man is deemed worthy of constant prayer. For when he reaches this, he has reached the pinnacle of all the virtues and has become a dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. For unless a man has received in all certainty the grace of the Comforter, he will be unable to perform constant and unceasing prayer restfully. When the Spirit dwells in a man, as the Apostle says, he never ceases to pray, since the Spirit Himself always prays [*within him*]. Then, whether he Rom. 8:26 sleeps or wakes, prayer is never separated from his soul. If he eats, or drinks, or lies down, or does something, or even in deep slumber, the

sweet fragrances and perfumes of prayer effortlessly exhale in his heart. He does not possess prayer in a limited way, but even though it should be outwardly still, at every moment it ministers within him secretly. For the silence of the limpidly pure is called prayer by one of the Christ-bearers, because their thoughts are divine motions. The movements of a pure heart and mind are meek and gentle cries, whereby the pure chant in a hidden manner to the Hidden God.

Question What is spiritual prayer, and how is a man who struggles deemed worthy of it?

Answer Spiritual prayer is the motions of the soul that partake of the energy of the Holy Spirit through exacting chastity and purity. One man in ten thousand is accounted worthy of spiritual prayer. It is the mystery of the future state and life; for herein a man is raised on high, and his nature remains inoperative and unmoved by any motion or memory of things present. The soul does not pray a prayer, but in awareness she perceives the spiritual things of that other age
[183] which transcend human conception; and the understanding of these is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is noetic divine vision, not the movement and entreaty of prayer, although it has its starting-point in prayer. For this reason some have already reached the perfection of purity, and there is no time when their inward motions are not confined in prayer, even as we said above. And when the Holy Spirit overshadows them, He always finds them in prayer. He brings them forth from prayer into *theoria,* which means 'spiritual vision.' They have no need of the form of prolonged prayer, nor of the standing and definite order of much liturgy, for it is sufficient for them to remember God and straightway they are taken captive by the love of Him. So as to render honor to prayer, however, they do not neglect standing at prayer; and in addition to their unceasing prayer, they stand on their feet at the prescribed times.

We see that when Saint Anthony was standing at the prayer of the ninth hour, he perceived that his mind was taken up. And when another Father stretched out his hands while standing at prayer, he entered an ecstasy for the period of four days. And likewise many others through prayer were taken captive by their strong recollection of God and their love for Him, and thus came to ecstasy. A man is ac-

counted worthy of this when he strips himself of inward and outward sin by the keeping of the Lord's commandments, which oppose sin. And if a man practises these commandments in their order, of necessity he will slip away from the manifold affairs of men; that is, he will, so to speak, disrobe himself of the body and be outside of it: not its nature, but its function. There is no man who walks in the pathways of the Lawgiver and practises His commandments, and sin continues to dwell in him. For this reason our Lord promised in the Gospels that He will make His abode with him who keeps His commandments. John 14:23

Question What is the perfection of all the fruits of the Spirit?

Answer When a man is deemed worthy of the perfect love of God.

Question And whence does a man know that he has attained to this?

Answer That whenever the recollection of God is stirred in his mind, straightway his heart is stirred with the love of Him and his eyes pour forth abundant tears. For love is wont to kindle tears by the recollection of beloved ones. A man who is in this state will never be found destitute of tears, because that which brings him to the recollection of God is never absent from him; wherefore even in sleep he converses with God. For love is wont to cause such things. This is perfection for men in their life here.

Question If, after a man has greatly toiled, labored, and struggled, the thought of pride shamelessly assails him – taking occasion from the beauty of his virtues – and reckons up the magnitude of his toil, [184] by what means should he restrain his thoughts and achieve such security in his soul as not to be persuaded by it?

Answer When a man comes to know that he can fall away from God as a dry leaf falls from a tree, then he knows the power of his soul. When the Lord withdraws His help from a man and permits him to enter alone into battle with the devil, and He does not go with him as He is wont to go with those who struggle in the contest and to assist them, then that man's strength is made manifest – nay rather, his defeat and consternation, and whether it was by his own strength that he acquired the aforesaid virtues and endured every struggle on their behalf. For God's providence accompanies the saints at all times, protecting and strengthening them, and with its aid a man overcomes all classes of men, whether he enters the contest and sufferings of

martyrdom or the other hardships that are undertaken and endured for God's sake. This is clear and evident and cannot be doubted.

For how else could human nature vanquish the power of the allurements which are incessantly active in a man's members, and grieve him, and are able mightily to overpower him? How is it that other men desire and covet victory over them, but though they vehemently contend against them, they are daily defeated, and abide in pain, lamentation, and toil on behalf of their souls, whereas you can easily bear the troubles of the body, which are so very distressing, and be little vexed thereby? And how else could a passible body contend against a sharp blade, endure the breaking of its limbs and every sort of torment, and not be vanquished by the sufferings – though a man cannot bear the pain of a thorn under his fingernail – nor even feel the manifold tortures according to the law of nature, save only if another power besides his natural power comes to him from elsewhere and allays the force of the torments?

There is nothing to prevent us from inserting here a narrative whose account is verily wondrous to those who hear it. Since we have brought to mind the account of God's providence for man, which makes him victorious in all his struggles for virtue's sake, it would not be right to pass this story by.

Socrates the historian, in a passage in his accounts of church history, while chronicling the kings of the Romans, comes to the Emperor Julian;[8] and after he concisely shows what evils were endured by the sons of the Church, he goes on in his account to relate one of the stories that came to pass in the city of Antioch. 'Now there was a certain young man, named Theodore, who was brought by the pagans to Sallustius, who commanded him to be given over to afflictions and torture; he gave order that he be torn with iron combs all over his body, and then, when he thought there was no more life in him, released him from torments. But God was the deliverer of that blessed man, for he lived for a long time after that confession. Rufinus, who wrote an *Ecclesiastical History* in the Latin tongue, said that much later he made the acquaintance of this blessed Theodore, and he asked him if, while he was being rent with wounds, he felt a great deal of pain. He gave him the answer that for a very brief space of time he

8. Julian the Apostate, who reigned 361–63.

had a sensation of the pains. But a certain young man stood before him, wiping away the sweat of his struggles, and strengthening his soul, and making the time of the struggle of his tortures to be a pleasure for him.'[9] O loving-kindness of God, how near His grace is to them that enter into the struggle for His sake, cheerfully to endure sufferings on His account!

Therefore, O man, do not show ingratitude to the providence which God manifests on your account. If it is obvious that you are not the victor but merely an instrument, as it were, and that it is the Lord Who is victorious in you, and that you receive the title of victor as a free gift, then what can hinder you from asking at all times for that same strength, what can hinder you from winning the same victories [185] while you give thanks to God for this? Have you not heard, O man, how many champions from the foundation of the world and the beginnings of time have fallen from the height of their struggle because they did not give thanks for this grace? As the gifts of God to the race of men are many and diverse, so there are many differences in the gifts received, corresponding to those who receive them. There is also [*the element of*] smallness and greatness in God's gifts, and though they are all sublime and marvellous, still one transcends the other in glory and honor, and one degree surpasses another degree.

It is one of the chief gifts of Christ that a man consecrates himself to the doing of good works and the practice of a virtuous discipline. For there are many who forget this grace, even that they have been accounted worthy that in God's eyes there be a distinction between them and the rest of men, that they have consecrated themselves to God, that they are among those who receive His gifts, and that they have even been chosen to serve and minister unto God; and instead of unceasingly thanking Him with their mouths for these things, they turn aside to pride and self-esteem. Their thinking is such, that they are not as men who have received the grace of liturgy so as to serve God with a pure life and spiritual doing, but as those who give God a

9. St. Theodore is commemorated on November 24. St. Isaac's often verbatim account of him may be compared with the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Second Series, Vol. II, p. 89. St. Theodore is also mentioned in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Theodoret and the *Life* of St. Andrew the Fool for Christ's sake of Constantinople.

present, instead of reckoning that He took them out from the midst of men and made them His intimates and initiates into the knowledge of His mysteries. Their souls do not tremble when they reflect on such things, nor even when they behold how their predecessors, who fostered the same thoughts, were suddenly deprived of their lofty rank, how in the twinkling of an eye the Lord cast them down from the very great glory and honor which they enjoyed, and how they turned aside to impurity, lasciviousness, and shameless acts in the manner of brute beasts.

For because they did not know their own lack of strength, nor remember unceasingly Him Who gave them the great gift of ministering unto Him, of abiding within the honor of His Kingdom, of living the same life with the angels, and of drawing nigh an angelic discipline, He cast them down from their work. And so by their change of life from one of stillness, He demonstrates to them that it was not by their own strength that they persevered in a well-ordered manner of life, though oppressed by the harassment of nature, the demons, and other adversities, but that this power belongs to God's grace. Things which the world cannot receive or hear of on account of their difficulty they patiently endured for a great length of time without being overcome, because a certain power accompanied them, sufficient to help and protect them in every circumstance. But because they forgot this power, the word of the Apostle was fulfilled in them: 'And even as they did not like to retain in their knowledge God, their Master,
[186] Who united clay to spiritual liturgy, He gave them over to a repro-
Rom. 1:28 bate mind,' and, as was meet, they received in their persons the disgrace which their error deserved.

Question Is it possible that a man who dares spontaneously to renounce the habitation of men completely, and suddenly with a good zeal to go forth [*naked*] like Adam into the uninhabited and terrible wilderness, could for this reason die of hunger on account of lack of shelter and the other necessities of life?

Answer He that made ready dwelling-places for the irrational animals before He created them and took concern for their needs, will in no wise overlook His creatures, and especially those who fear Him and who follow Him with simplicity and an unquestioning mind. The man who surrenders his will to God in every matter is never con-

cerned with his body's needs or hardships and sufferings, but his whole desire is to remain within the squalor of his ascetical discipline and patiently to endure his life of lowliness. He is not as one who quails before afflictions, but he reckons as sweet and delectable his estrangement from the whole world. For the sake of purity he suffers hardship amid hills and mountains and becomes like a wanderer in the country of brute beasts, lest, while giving rest to his body, he live a wretchedly defiled life. And when at every hour he surrenders himself over to death, lest he should be deprived of the pure mode of life which is dear to God, he receives help from Him. To our God be glory and honor, and may He preserve us in His purity and sanctify us by the holiness of the grace of the Holy Spirit unto the honor of His Name, that in purity we may glorify His holy Name all the days of our life. Amen.

Homily 38*

That the body that fears temptations becomes a friend of sin

ONE OF THE SAINTS said that the body that fears temptation becomes a friend of sin, lest it should endure hardship and lose its life. Therefore the Holy Spirit forces it to die, for He knows that if it does not die, it will not vanquish sin. If a man wishes the Lord to dwell in him, he constrains his body, he serves the Lord, he labors in the Spirit's commandments recorded by the Apostle, and he preserves his soul from the works of the flesh which the Apostle has written down.

Gal. 5:19–21

The body that is mingled with sin finds rest in the works of the flesh; but the Spirit of God does not find repose in its fruits. When the body is weakened by fasting and lowliness, the soul is spiritually strengthened in prayer. When it is straitened in many ways by the tribulations of stillness and is in privation and necessity, coming near even to losing its life, it is wont to entreat you, saying: 'Leave me be a while, so that in moderation I can struggle; already I walk righteously, for lo, I have been tried by these many evils.'

But when you give it rest from afflictions and grant it some small ease as having compassion on it, then however little it might be at rest, it will whisper falsehoods to you in a cajoling manner, little by little, until it causes you to quit the desert (for its cajoling is very powerful). It will say to you: 'Even close to the world we can maintain an excellent discipline, living in our present practices, for greatly have we been tried. Just put me to the test, and if I am not as you wish, we can always return. Lo, the desert will not run away from us.' Do not trust it, however hard it implores you and whatever promises it makes, for it will not do as it says. Once you have granted its request, it will hurl you into great falls, from whence you will not be able to rise up and extricate yourself.

* In the Syriac this is the end of Homily 37.

Whenever you grow despondent because of trials and you weary of them, say to yourself: 'Again you long for an impure and shameful life.' And if the body says to you: 'It is a great sin to kill oneself,' answer it: 'Yes, I am killing myself, because I cannot live a pure life. I will die here rather than ever see again the true death of my soul away from God. It is better for me to die here for the sake of purity than to live an evil life in the world. I have willingly chosen this death on account of my sins. I slay myself because I have sinned before the Lord and no longer shall I anger Him. What is life to me, if it be afar off from God? I will endure these hardships, lest I should become a stranger to my heavenly hope. And why have I been created in the world, if I simply enter and leave it? And what would God profit by my life on this earth, if therein I live wickedly and anger Him?'

Homily 39

On the different methods of the devil's warfare against those who journey on the narrow way that transcends the world

On the first method

OUR ADVERSARY, the devil, has the long-standing habit of artfully choosing modes of warfare against those who enter upon this contest after an examination of their weapons, and he changes the manner of his struggle against them according to the aim of each. He observes those who are indolent in their volition and whose thoughts are infirm, and from the very beginning he vehemently wars upon them, raising up against them violent and dreadful temptations. He does this in order to make them taste the modes of his wickedness at the start of their course, so that they should be overcome by fear and their pathway should seem to them rugged and impassable. Thus they will say to themselves, 'If the beginning of the way is so arduous and harsh, who can confront unto the end the many struggles that lie herein?' Thenceforth they are unable to withstand anymore, to make any further progress, or even to take anything else into consideration, because of the urgency of their anxiety over it.

The devil only has to straiten them with his warfare for a little while before they turn to flight. Rather, it is God Himself Who permits the devil to prevail against them, and He gives them no aid whatever. And this is because they entered the Lord's contest with doubt and coldness. For the prophet says: 'Cursed is the man who doeth the works of the Lord carelessly, keeping back his sword from blood'; and again, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that fear Him.' For God commands us to confront the devil with fearlessness and ardor, saying: 'Start now to destroy him, rush to war against him, grapple with him manfully, and I shall put the fear of you upon your foes that are under heaven, saith the Lord.' For if you do not voluntarily die a

Jer. 31 (48):10

Ps. 33:18; 84:9

Deut. 11:25

sensory death for the sake of God's goodness, involuntarily you will die a noetic death, [*falling*] away from God.

Whatever your portion should be, voluntarily accept temporary sufferings for its sake without misgivings, that you may enter into the glory of God. For if you suffer bodily death in the Lord's contest, the Lord Himself will crown you, and God will give your venerable relics the honor of the martyrs. Therefore, as I said above, those who, at the very outset, are negligent and languid and have not constrained themselves to surrender themselves to death, are henceforward found always to be inferior and cowardly in every battle. Rather, God permits them to be pursued and warred upon, because they did not truly seek Him, but they endeavored to do His work as tempters and mockers of God. Hence the devil himself knew them from the beginning and tested their thoughts, revealing those men to be cowardly, self-loving and, moreover, sparers of their bodies. So he drives them like a hurricane, since he does not see in them the noetic power that he is accustomed to see in the saints. For in proportion to a man's volition to strive toward God, and in proportion to his purpose to attain his goal for God's sake, God works with him, helps him, and manifests His providence in him. The devil cannot draw near to a man or attack him with temptations unless it be permitted by the bidding of Heaven, or it be that the man himself grows lax and surrenders himself to shameful thoughts and to distraction, or becomes proud and conceited, or accepts thoughts of doubt and cowardliness.

Now the devil does not so ask God for such men as these, for unskilled and inexperienced beginners, in order to tempt them, as he does for holy and great men, for he knows that God will not permit the former to fall into his hands. God knows that they do not have the strength for the devil's temptations, and so He does not surrender them unless they have within them one of the causes aforementioned; in such a case, the power of God's providence withdraws from them. This is the first method of the devil's warfare.

*On the second method of the devil's warfare**

Whenever the devil sees men who are courageous and strong, who reckon death as nothing, who go forth with great zeal, who give

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

[191] themselves up to every trial and death, and who set at naught the life of the world and of the body and every temptation, he does not confront them immediately, nor does he openly reveal himself to them, but he restrains himself, giving place to them; and he does not go out to meet them at their first assault, nor does he draw himself up to do battle with them. For he knows that a man's beginning in every war is more fervent, and that zealous warriors are not lightly vanquished, and he sees how his antagonist has great zeal.

It is not, however, that the devil does this from fear of them, but from fear of that divine power that sets them ablaze by means of that which they bear in abundance, until of their own volition they cast it off little by little when they become self-confident. So long as he sees them in this state, he dares not touch them; but he waits to see them cool from their zeal and cast off the weapons they had fashioned for themselves in their minds by the diverse divine words [*of Scripture*] and recollections that assist and help them. He watches for the time when they are lax, when they turn aside a little from their former thoughts, and when through the seductive reflections that well up in their minds they begin of themselves to devise inventions for their own defeat. They, by themselves, dig a pit of perdition for their souls with the wandering thoughts arising in their minds from indolence, through which coldness reigns within them, that is, in their hearts.

When the devil refrains from warring against them and, as it were, spares them, he does not do so voluntarily, nor does he fear them, nor is he put to shame by them. For he holds them in contempt. But I think that it is because a certain power encompasses those who strive toward God with ardent zeal, who go forth like children, who renounce the world indiscriminately, hoping and believing on God, and who have no conception of him against whom they must fight. For this reason God repels from them the violence of the devil's wickedness, that it might not come near them. For the enemy is bridled when he beholds the guardian [*angel*] who always shields them. If they do not cast off from themselves the causes of their being helped – that is to say, their prayers, labors, and humility – then their defender and helper will never depart from them.

See, and write these things in your heart; for the love of pleasure and ease is a cause of abandonment. But if a man perseveres and

keeps himself firmly from this, God's assistance will never leave him, and the enemy will not be permitted to attack him. And if it happens that one time he is permitted to attack him, it is for instruction; but the holy power continues to accompany and support him, and he does not fear the devil's temptations, for his thought is confident, and because of that [*holy*] power he despises them.

The divine power teaches him just as a man teaches a small boy to swim. When the boy begins to sink, the man raises him up, because the boy swims above the hands of his teacher. And when he begins to [192] grow fearful that he will drown, the teacher who holds him in his arms cries out to him encouragingly, 'Do not fear, I am holding you!' And just as a mother who, in teaching her little son to walk, steps back from him and calls him, and as he comes toward her on his little feet he begins to tremble and is about to fall by reason of their softness and delicacy, and she runs and catches him in her embrace, so the grace of God also embraces and teaches men who purely and with simplicity have surrendered themselves into the hands of their Creator, and have renounced the world with their whole heart and follow after Him.

But you, O man, who have set out in pursuit of God, always remember throughout your life of struggle the first beginning and first zeal you had when entering upon the path, and the ardent thoughts with which you left your home and manner of life and enrolled yourself in the fighting ranks. In this manner examine yourself each day, that there be no cooling of your soul's ardor with respect to any of the weapons that you carry, nor in the zeal which blazed up within you at the commencement of your struggle, lest you lose any of those weapons with which you were arrayed at the start of your contest. Constantly raise your voice in the camp, encouraging and urging to valor the sons of the right (that is, your own thoughts) and show the others (that is, the enemy's forces) that you are keeping watch. If at the beginning you see that the tempter violently assaults you to frighten you, do not grow faint-hearted, for perhaps this is profitable for you. For He Who saves you does not permit anything to approach you, unless He should bring about thereby some provision for your profit.

Do not be slothful at the beginning lest, having been lethargic

now, you should fall when you try to advance, and be no longer able to withstand the afflictions that come upon you, I mean from hunger, sickness, terrifying apparitions, and the like. Do not pervert the intention of Him Who has set your contest, because it procures help for you against your adversary, so that he will not find you as he hopes. But entreat God unceasingly, weep before His grace, lament, and toil until He sends you a helper.[1] For if but once you see him that saves you at your side, you will no longer be defeated by your enemy who opposes you.

Thus far two methods of the devil's warfare have been described.

*On the third method of the enemy's warfare against strong and courageous men**

After all this, the devil again rises up against a man, but he has not
[193] the power to withstand him in the contest; or rather, he cannot withstand the angel who strengthens and helps the man. Because of his helper the man is exalted above the devil, and from him he receives strength and patience, such that his dense material body can vanquish a bodiless and noetic being. When, therefore, the enemy sees all this strength that the man has received from God, and that his external senses are not overwhelmed by what he sees and the sounds he hears, and that his thoughts are not weakened by his[2] enticements and panderings, then the crafty one seeks a way to part the angel, the man's helper, from him. Nay more, the crafty one wishes to blind the understanding of the man who receives help, that he may be helpless, and to stir up proud thoughts within him, that he might think that all his strength originates from his own forces, that he acquired this wealth by himself, and that by his own power he keeps himself safe from the adversary and manslayer.

Sometimes he thinks that he defeated the enemy by chance, sometimes because of the enemy's powerlessness (I shall remain silent concerning the enemy's other methods and the blasphemous thoughts which cause the soul terror by the very memory of them alone). Sometimes the enemy introduces his delusion under the guise of divine revelations, and he shows him things in dreams. When the man

1. I.e. a guardian angel. * Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.
2. I.e. the devil's.

is awake, the wily one transforms himself into an angel of light. He tries all this in order to persuade a man little by little to concur with it, so that the man will surrender himself into his hands. But if the prudent man keeps his thoughts in safety, or rather, if he can hold fast to the memory of Him Who aids him, and fix the eye of his heart steadfastly upon Heaven, that he may not see those who whisper these things to him, then the enemy will be diligent once again to devise other methods of warfare. 2 Cor. 11:14

*On the enemy's fourth and obdurate warfare**

Finally there remains for him only this, since nature is kindred to it, and for this reason he has a special expectation that he will destroy the man with it. What is this device? It is under every pretext to cause him to meet with those things because of which he often sins on account of nature. For often the athlete's understanding is blinded by the sight and nearness of the objects of sense, and he is easily defeated in his struggle when he is near to them, and particularly when they are before his very eyes. The villainous devil employs this method with knowledge and experience, that is, the experience he has with many ascetics, mighty men, and the great who have fallen by means of these things, and he does this very shrewdly. Although he cannot force a man to do anything in actual deed, because of the safety that [194] stillness furnishes the man, and because his dwelling-place is far from the occasions and causes of sin, yet he endeavors to delude his mind with illusions and to represent to him false phantasies in the mask of truth. And to the end that a man will begin to desire these things, the devil stimulates him and makes movements to arise within him; thus he brings him to ponder upon them with shameful thoughts, to consent to them, and to become guilty of them, so that the man's helper might depart from him.

For he knows well that a man's victory, defeat, treasure, succor, and simply everything that pertains to an ascetic, are secured through his thought and are gained in an instant, such that his thought need only move from its place, and descend from the heights to earth, and his volition show its consent but for an instant, as has happened to many of the saints through phantasies of a woman's beauty. And

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

many times he has devised means actually to bring women to those who dwell a mile or two miles or a day's journey from the world. But since he is unable to do this to those who remain far withdrawn from the world, he shows woman's beauty to them in phantasies: sometimes adorned with elegant clothing and lascivious in appearance, and sometimes he shamelessly shows them the form of a naked woman. For by these things and their like he has conquered some in the actual deed, some he has mocked in phantasies by reason of the laxity of their thoughts, so that he might throw them into the abyss of despair; and this becomes cause for them to return to the world and their souls to fall away from their heavenly hope.

But other men, stronger than these, who were enlightened by grace, vanquished both him and his phantasies, and trampled upon the pleasures of the flesh, and were found to be approved in their love of God. Often, too, the enemy has caused them to behold apparitions of gold, precious things, golden treasures; and at times he showed these things to them in reality, that by means of these different phantasies he might, perhaps, stop some one of them in his course and trip him up by one of his snares and nets.

A Prayer But Lord, O Lord, Thou Who knowest our infirmity, lead us not into these temptations, for mighty and proven men hardly emerge from this gate victorious!

The devil and tempter is allowed to make war upon the saints in all these ways of temptation, that thereby their love of God may be proved, and that it may become evident whether, when they are separated, secluded, deprived, and destitute of these objects of sense, they remain lovers of God, abiding in His love and truly loving Him; and whether, when they draw near to such things, they endeavor to despise and repudiate them because of their love for God, and being enticed by them, they remain undefeated and do not alter their love
[195] for God. They are tried in this manner, that they may be known not only by God, but also by the devil.

For the enemy greatly desires to tempt and try every man, if this were possible to him, and to ask God for them all that he might tempt them, even as he asked for the righteous man Job, saying, 'Doth Job
Job 1:9 ff. fear God for naught?' And when for a brief time God gives His permission, the devil draws nigh to tempt them vehemently, in propor-

tion to the strength of those whom he tempts; then the iniquitous one assails them as he desires. By this means, however, those who are true and steadfast in the love of God are proved as to whether they despise all these things and reckon them as nothing in comparison with the love of God. Ever humbling themselves in this manner, they ascribe glory to Him Who works with them in all things and is the Source of their victory; and in their struggle they surrender themselves into His hands, saying to God, 'Thou art the Mighty One, O Lord, and Thine is the contest: wage war on our behalf and be therein victorious, O Lord.' At such a time they are proved as gold in the furnace.

But when alloyed and spurious men are tested and known in these temptations, they fall away from God as dross, since giving way to the enemy they leave the field of battle laden with guilt, either because of the laxity of their mind or because of their pride. They were not worthy to receive the power that the saints had working within them, for the power that helps us cannot be defeated. The Lord is almighty and more powerful than all, and at all times He is victorious in the bodies of mortal men when He descends to aid them in their warfare. But if they are defeated, it is evident that they are defeated without Him.

These are men who have voluntarily stripped themselves of God by reason of their ungratefulness, since they have not been accounted worthy of that power which assists the victorious, and they perceive that they are even devoid of their own power which they were accustomed to have at the times of their violent battles. How do they perceive this? They see that their defeat is pleasurable and sweet in their eyes, and that it is difficult for them patiently to endure the hardship of their struggle with the enemy, the same hardship they were wont zealously to overcome completely by the impulse inherent in their nature's movement, which was formerly so fervent and keen. But now they do not find this in their souls.

Those who are slothful and lax when they begin are overcome not only by these struggles and their like, but they are even frightened and troubled by the rustle of a leaf, and are vanquished by some brief necessity due to hunger and by some slight illness; thus they renounce and turn back.

But those who are proven and true do not even take their fill of

greens and vegetables; and even if they eat nothing but the roots of dried herbs, they cannot be persuaded to taste any food before the established meal-time. Moreover, they lie upon the ground because of
[196] their body's enervation, their eyes are dimmed by their extreme physical exhaustion, and their very soul is constrained and nigh to depart from their body, but even so they do not give themselves over to defeat, nor do they abandon their firm volition. For they long and yearn to do violence to themselves for the love of God, and they freely choose to labor for virtue's sake rather than to possess this transient life and all its comforts. And whenever temptations come upon them, they especially rejoice and are the more perfected by them.[3] Nor do the arduous labors which they endure make them doubt the love of Christ, but until they quit this life, they much prefer valiantly to accept abuse and they do not retreat. But to our God be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

3. Syriac *because they know that temptations render them perfect.*

Homily 40

On continuous fasting, and remaining collected in one place, and what are the consequences of this; and that by discerning knowledge I have learned the exact use of these things

HAVING BEEN TEMPTED over a great length of time in things from the right hand and from the left, and testing myself often in both, and having received countless blows from the adversary, and been deemed worthy of great and secret aid, I have carried on an examination of myself for many long years; and through experience and God's grace I have learned that the foundation of all good things, the return of the soul from the enemy's captivity, and the path which leads to the light, and itself brings life, are these two virtuous activities: to remain collected in one place, and to fast perpetually. I mean, to set for yourself the rule of wise mastery of the belly, of prudent and immovable continuance in one place, and of unremitting study and meditation on God.

From this is born the submission of the senses; from this is born the watchfulness of the understanding; by this the ferocity of the passions which rage in the body is tamed; from this comes quietness of thoughts; from this come the mind's luminous movements; from this is born the zeal for the practice of virtue; from this are born sublime and subtle perceptions; from this are born boundless tears which flow at all times, and the remembrance of death; from this is born pure chastity which is remote from every imagination that tempts the mind; from this comes clairvoyance and the keen knowledge of things afar off; from this are born the most profound of mystic perceptions that the mind can apprehend, that is, the strength of divine utterances, the innermost movements that arise in the soul, and the discrimination and discernment of spiritual things: those which are of the holy powers and true visions, and those from empty phantasies; from this arises fear of the pathways and channels in the open sea of the mind, a fear which cuts off slothfulness and heedlessness; from

this is kindled the flame of zeal which tramples upon every peril and overstrides all dismay, and the fervor which despises every desire, blots it out of the thinking, and engenders oblivion of the memory of every transitory thing and all else of this nature. But to put it succinctly: from these two are born the freedom of the true man, the soul's renewal, and resurrection with Christ in the Kingdom.

Yet if a man is negligent in these two activities, he should know that not only will he cause himself to lose all the foregoing blessings, but by disdaining these two he will also profoundly shake the foundation of all the virtues. And just as these are the origin and chief of the soul's divine activities, and the door, and the way leading to Christ (if a man acquire them and persevere in them), so, in like manner, if he should depart and leap away from them, he will descend to their opposites, I mean, to wandering from place to place and to lawless gluttony. These are the beginnings of the things opposed to the aforesaid and they prepare a place in the soul for the aforesaid passions.

At the very beginning, the first – that is, wandering – releases the submissive senses from the bonds of self-constraint. And what comes of this? From this are born: improper and unexpected encounters which border upon falls; the turmoil of mighty waves awakened by the vision of the eyes; a fierce flame which masters and possesses the body; sudden stumbling in conscious thinking; unrestrained thoughts which precipitate toward a fall; tepid love for the works of God; gradual effacement of the special characteristics of stillness; and a complete abandonment of a man's rule of life. As a result of that which assails the man through the involuntary and manifold spectacles which he beholds in his peregrinations from country to country and from place to place, long-forgotten wicked deeds revive, and he learns new ones which he had not formerly known. And the passions, which by God's grace had been already mortified in his soul, and whose memory had already perished from his mind, are stirred to motion anew and begin to compel his soul to work their wont. But so as not to recount all the rest, I say that these things come upon a man as a result of wandering and of not patiently enduring the hardships of stillness.

And what are the consequences of the second vice, that is, of pursuing the work of swine? What indeed is the work of swine, if not to

set no bounds upon the belly and to fill it incessantly, and to have no [199]
appointed time to satisfy the body's need, as rational beings have? What then are the consequences of this? From this are born drowsiness and a great heaviness of the body joined with loosening of the shoulders. Thereupon follow: compulsion to leave off God's liturgy; a lassitude that hinders a man from making prostrations during his prayers, and indifference to the usual acts of worship; darkening and coldness of the understanding; a mind that is fat and rendered undiscerning by agitation and much darkening of the thoughts; a dense and gloomy cloud spread over the entire soul; great accidie in every godly work as well as in reading, since he does not taste the sweetness of the divine sayings; frequent neglect of necessary things; an unrestrained mind that roams throughout the whole world; many humors collecting in the limbs; impure nocturnal imaginings of sordid phantasies, and improper images pervaded with lust which penetrate the soul and pollutedly do as they please. The bed of the wretched man, his clothing, and his entire body are defiled by the great stream of shameful matter which issues forth from him as from a fountain. And this occurs to him not only at night but during the day also. His body continuously exudes matter and thereby defiles his mind, such that on account of these things the monk disavows his chastity. Delectable titillations produce an incessant, insufferable burning throughout his body. Seductive thoughts come to him, depicting beauty before his eyes, stimulating him at all times and titillating his mind by converse with them. Because his faculty of discretion has been overclouded, the monk unhesitatingly joins himself to these thoughts in his meditation and in his desire. And the prophet has said the same thing: 'This is the requital of thy sister Sodom, who, revelling, ate bread in abundance.' Ezek. 16:49

One of the great philosophers said: 'If a man satiate his body with delicacies, he delivers his soul up to warfare. And if ever he comes to himself and endeavors to compel himself to abstinence, he cannot, because of the mightily burning movement of his body and the violence and coercion of the incitements and titillations which enslave his soul according to their pleasure.' Do you see the refinement of this man bereft of God? And again the same sage says, 'Fresh and tender nourishment swiftly imparts to the soul the lust of passion;

then, death becomes to her something grievous, and she stands in terror of God's judgment.'

The soul, however, that devotes herself to the recollection of profitable things, finds rest in her freedom; her cares are small, and she repents of nothing. She takes forethought for virtue, she bridles the passions, she keeps guard upon excellence, and thus she enjoys growth that is unhindered, joy free of solicitude, a good life, and a
[200] perilless haven. Bodily pleasures not only strengthen the passions and give them power against the soul, but also tear the soul away from her very roots. Together with this, they incite the belly to intemperance and lack of rule as regards the hours [*for eating*], that is, to untimely satisfaction of the body's need. The man who is harried by these things does not wish to suffer hunger even for the briefest time so as to control himself, because he is a slave of the passions.

These are the fruits of the shameful passion of gluttony, and those stated beforehand are the fruits of not patiently enduring in one place and of not leading a life of stillness. The enemy knows these times – in that he always follows us about – and that especially in these two instances our nature can be easily shaken and provoked to passion, and he knows that the mind especially strays when the eyes wander and the belly is at ease. Therefore, he endeavors and diligently strives at precisely these times to make us add to our nature's weakness and to sow in us sundry forms of evil thoughts, so that (if possible) in the intensity of the combat the passions might gain ascendency over nature and sink a man with a fall.

Since the enemy knows these times, it behooves us to be conscious of our weakness and the strength of our nature, and that it cannot withstand the violent assaults and disturbances of such times, and the subtlety of the thoughts which, like fine dust, are blown into our eyes, so that we cannot see ourselves or bear up against what befalls us. But through the many trials that we have undergone, often in great distress by reason of the enemy's temptations, we have finally learned to be prudent and not to allow ourselves heedlessly to obey the will of our ease, nor to be vanquished by hunger, nor straitness, nor to be shaken from the place of our stillness (lest we find ourselves in a place where the things we have spoken of can easily come upon us), nor fabricate for ourselves pretexts and ways whereby we may leave the

wilderness. Such things are manifest machinations of the devil. If you patiently endure in the desert, you will not be tempted, for there you will see no women, nor anything harmful to your mode of life, nor will you hear unseemly cries.

'And what hast thou to do with the way of Egypt, to drink the water of Gihon?' Understand what I say. Show your enemy your experience through your perseverance in small matters, so that he will not seek great things from you. Let these small matters be a pattern for you, that through your struggles in small things you may lay a trap for him and give him no leisure to contrive great snares for you. For how could the man who cannot be persuaded by the enemy to take even five steps from the door of his solitary dwelling be convinced to abandon the wilderness or to draw nigh to a village? And how can [201] the hermit who refuses to peek out the window of his hermitage be persuaded to come out of it? Or will the man who can scarcely be induced to take a scanty portion of food late in the evening be enticed by thoughts to eat before the appropriate time? Will the man who is ashamed to take his fill of contemptible food long for expensive dishes? And how can the enemy entice a man to gaze after foreign beauty when he will not even look upon his own body?

Jer. 2:18

It is evident that a man is vanquished only when at the beginning he despises such small matters, thus giving the enemy ground to wage war against him in great ones. He who makes no provision for this temporal life, not even that he might remain in it for the briefest moment, how will such a man be dismayed by suffering and afflictions that bring him closer to his longed-for death? This is warfare fought with discretion; for wise men do not allow themselves to make preparations for great ascetic struggles, but rather they know that the patience which they manifest in small matters preserves them from having to undergo great labors.

Firstly, therefore, the devil strives to extinguish the unceasing prayer of the heart, and then he persuades a monk to disregard the fixed hours of prayer and the rule that he performs bodily. Thus, at first the thinking becomes lax and permits the monk to partake of some paltry, meager bits of food before the appointed time; and after this fall, whereby he ruins his abstinence, the monk slips into intemperance and dissipation. First, the monk is vanquished, or rather, it

becomes a trifling thing in his eyes to gaze upon the nakedness of his body or upon some other beautiful aspect of his limbs when he disrobes himself, or when he goes out to fulfill a bodily want, or to pass water, and he loses control over his senses, or he audaciously introduces his hand under his clothes and touches his body; one thing after another will then rise up within him. The man who in these small things does not preserve the safeguard of his mind, but rather dissipates it and displays laxity in one of these matters, opens up against himself great and dangerous inroads.

For thoughts, I say by way of example, are like water, and so long as they are confined on all sides, they proceed in their right order. If once they find a small outlet, however, they escape and destroy the dyke and cause great devastation. The enemy stands before us day and night, waiting, watching, and observing us to spy out a door for him to enter when we have opened wide our senses. As soon as we have been negligent in one of the aforementioned ways, this cunning and shameless cur lets fly his arrows at us. At times it is our nature itself which loves ease, familiarity, laughter, wandering of the mind and slothfulness, and becomes a source of passions, a sea of turmoil; but at other times it is the adversary himself who instills these things
[202] into the soul. Let us therefore exchange our great labors and the causes of grievous peril for small ones. If indeed these small things are neglected, though they be nothing, then, as we have demonstrated, through them will be generated great struggles, arduous labors, confused battles, and the very gravest wounds. Who for a small outlay would not choose to find sweet repose?

O wisdom, how wondrous thou art, and how thou dost foresee all things from afar! Blessed is the man who has found thee, for he is free from the indolence of youth which, by a little neglect, purchases great calamities. Well did one of the philosophers say, that once he fell under the influence of lethargy, but becoming aware of this, he sat up with a start. Another, seeing him, laughed because of it. Yet the first retorted, saying: 'It was not this I feared, but negligence, for a little negligence can be the agent of great perils. By the fact that I sat up straightway when I transgressed my rule, I showed myself to be vigilant and that I am not found negligent even in those things which are unworthy of fear.'

For this is love of wisdom: that a man is ever watchful even in the small and insignificant things he does; for in this manner he lays up for himself great consolation. He does not drowse, lest something contrary should befall him, but he cuts off occasions in good time. He disperses slight grief through very small labors, and by them he redeems himself from great grief and treads it under foot.

Fools prefer brief comfort that is near at hand to a distant kingdom, not knowing that it is better for a man to suffer torments in his struggle than to take his ease upon a royal bed of this world under the condemnation of slothfulness. Wise men greatly prefer death to the censure that they have accomplished some work without sobriety. Hence a philosopher says, 'Be vigilant and sober with respect to your life, for slumber is natural to the mind, and is the image of true death.' And the philosopher of the house of God, Basil, writes, 'Do not expect the man to be eminent in great things who is slothful in small ones.' Do not be disheartened in the works by which you wish to find life, nor shrink from dying for them.*

Faintness of heart is a sign of despondency, and negligence is the mother of both. A cowardly man shows that he suffers from two diseases: love of his flesh and lack of faith; for love of one's flesh is a sign of unbelief. But he who despises the love of the flesh proves that he believes in God with his whole heart and awaits the age to come.

If there is a man who has drawn nigh unto God without perils, struggles, and temptations, imitate him! A courageous heart and scorn of perils comes from one of two causes: either from hardness of heart [203]
or from great faith in God. Pride accompanies hardness of heart, but humility accompanies faith. A man cannot acquire hope in God unless he first does His will with exactness. For hope in God and manliness of heart are born of the testimony of the conscience, and by the truthful testimony of the mind we possess confidence towards God. The testimony of the mind consists in the fact that a man's conscience does not accuse him of negligence in anything within his powers that it is his duty to do. 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we boldness toward God.' Thus boldness comes from the achievements of 1 John 3:21
virtue and a good conscience. It is a hard thing to be enslaved to the

* Here the Syriac begins a new homily entitled *Brief sections distinguishing the mind's motions.*

body. He who is aware of his hope in God, even to a small extent, will never more be persuaded to serve this hard master, the body.

A man remains in continual silence and perseveres in stillness for one of three reasons: either for the glory of men, or from ardent zeal for virtue, or because he has some divine converse within himself and his mind is drawn away to this. But if a man does not have one of the latter two, he will necessarily be afflicted by the malady first mentioned. Virtue is not the manifestation of many and various works performed by the agency of the body, but a heart that is most wise in its hope and unites a right aim to godly works. Often the mind can accomplish that which is good without bodily works, but the body without wisdom of the heart can gain no profit for all it may do. Yet when he finds an opportunity to do good, the man of God will not be able to refrain from showing his love for God by the toil of his deeds. The first discipline always prospers; the second often, but sometimes not. Do not consider it a small thing that a man be always far removed from the causes of the passions. To our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 41*

On the motions of the body

THE MOTION OF THE LOWER MEMBERS of the body which becomes fierce without thoughts – or rather, the shameful pleasure which throbs hotly beneath the navel and drives the soul to frenzy against her will – undoubtedly wells forth into the body from the satiety of the belly. In this struggle, count withdrawal from all that incites you, and from the sight of women, as a stout and invincible weapon, for even the adversary cannot work within us what nature is able to effect by its power. Do not suppose that nature ever forgets what God has naturally sown in it for the begetting of children and for testing us who carry on this fight. But withdrawal from the objects of desire mortifies all lust in our members, consigning the memory thereof to oblivion and destruction.

The thoughts of things afar off, which simply pass through the mind and produce a cool and faint motion, differ from the thoughts that submerge the mind by the indelible sight of some material object and evoke the passions by its proximity, that nourish lust in a man as oil nourishes the flame of a lamp, that rekindle a passion already flickering and nearly gone out, and that trouble the sea of the body by rocking the ship of the mind. Without some supplement from without, this natural movement (which inhabits us simply for the sake of procreation) cannot shake the will from limpid purity or unsettle chastity, since God has not given nature the power to subdue a man's good volition to strive toward Him. Whenever a man is defeated either by anger or by lust, it is not a power of nature that compels him to leave his nature's confines and to withdraw from what is his duty, but it is something which we add to nature by occasions provided by the will.

All things that God has made, He has made beautiful and in due proportion. And so long as measure in natural things is rightly pre-

* In the Syriac this is the end of Homily 40.

served in us, the provocations of nature cannot constrain us to stray from the path of God's laws, being swept away as by a flood. Then the body is only stirred by orderly, gentle impulses, which merely inform us that there is passion within us, but which produce no titillation or fierce turmoil so strong as to interfere with chastity or to darken the mind by anger and to move us from peace to wrath. But if at any time we greedily desire the things of the senses (whereby anger usually takes on its contranatural fury), or food, or drink, or immoderation, or proximity to women and gazing at them or at comely faces, or conversation about them (from which things the flame of lust is kindled and surges through the body), then we change the gentleness of our nature to fury: be it on account of the many bodily humors, or because of various sights of physical objects.

At times, too, the movement of our members is permitted [*by God*] because of our conceit, yet this movement is not like the former; those former we call the conflicts of liberty, and they belong to the common way of nature. But we may recognize the warfare that comes upon us by [*God's*] permission because of our self-esteem, when we have passed many years in prayer and labors and presume that we have accomplished something thereby; for then it is that God permits warfare to besiege us, that we may learn humility. The other conflicts that surpass our strength, and are not from this cause, come upon us because of our slothfulness. For when by gluttony we add to nature some palpable thing, nature can no longer be persuaded to keep the order with which it was endowed from its creation. The man who rejects tribulations and constant seclusion [*in his cell*] is involuntarily compelled to love sin; for without these two we are not able to separate ourselves from the inducements of our thought, which diminish as our pains multiply. Tribulations and perils kill the sweetness of the passions, but ease nourishes and increases them.

Thus I have clearly come to know that God and His angels rejoice at hardships, but the devil and his servants at the delight, pleasure, and ease of the flesh. For if it is with afflictions and straitness that the commandments of God are performed, but we despise afflictions, then we are devising means of disdaining Him Who gave the commandments. For the sake of love of the passions born of ease, we nullify the cause of virtue, I mean straitness and affliction; and to the

extent of the ease that we have procured for ourselves, we make room in ourselves for the passions. When the body is found in straitness, the thoughts cannot wander about in vain concerns; and when a man joyfully endures toils and afflictions, he can soundly bridle his thoughts, since his very thoughts are quelled by labors. [206]

If a man remembers his former sins and chastens himself, God will then take care to give him rest, because the Lord rejoices in that he, as a sinner, has passed sentence against himself for straying from the way of God; and this is a mark of the true path of repentance. The more a man constrains his soul, the more the honor he receives from God increases. Every joy whose cause is not in virtue immediately awakens movements of desire in him who has partaken of it; yet understand that we have said this with respect to every passionate desire, not only concerning the desire inherent to nature. To our God be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 42

On the kinds of different temptations; and on how sweet are the temptations that come to pass and are endured for the truth's sake; and on the levels and disciplines through which the sagacious man makes his way

THE VIRTUES follow one another in succession, so that the path of virtue might not become grievous and burdensome, and so that by being achieved in order progressively they may be made light; thus the hardships endured for the sake of the good should be as beloved as the good itself. No one can achieve true non-possessiveness unless he resolves within himself to endure tribulations with gladness. And no man can endure tribulations unless he believes that there is something more excellent than bodily comfort, the which he will receive in recompense for the afflictions that he has prepared himself to undergo. The love of afflictions must first have stirred in the man who has prepared to deprive himself of possessions, for only thereafter does the thought come to him to possess none of the things of this world. And every man who draws nigh to affliction is first made steadfast by faith, and then he approaches afflictions.

A man who deprives himself of material things, but has not cast off the activity of the senses (I mean sight and hearing), has procured for himself a double portion of affliction and will doubly suffer hardship and tribulation. For indeed, what profit is it for a man to deprive himself of sensory things, and yet through the senses still to delight in them? For by the passions which they cause he experiences the same thing which formerly he suffered in actual deed, since the recollection of his accustomed intercourse with sensory things has not been effaced from his thinking. If mental images of things, in absence of the things themselves, cause a man to feel distressed, what are we to say if the things themselves are near and round about us? How excellent in this respect is the discipline of solitude, how greatly does it

aid! For it mightily silences the thoughts, provides strength for endurance, and teaches a man great patience in the afflictions which must necessarily come upon him.

Do not seek advice from a man who does not lead a life similar to your own, even if he be very wise. Confide your thoughts to a man who, though he lack learning, has experience in [*spiritual*] things, rather than to a learned philosopher who speaks on the basis of speculations, having no actual experience. And what is experience? Experience is not that which is gained when a man approaches and gazes upon things (for since he does not pass time with them, he secures no true knowledge of them), but when he clearly perceives by trial their profit and detriment. For often a thing will seem harmful, yet within, it is found to be wholly full of profit; and likewise understand the converse of this also: I mean, a thing often appears to be profitable, whereas within, it is filled with much harm. So it is that many men are harmed by what seems very profitable, and the testimony of their knowledge is not true. Therefore follow the counsel of a man who knows how with patience to make trial of things that demand discernment. Not every man is able to give trustworthy advice, but only he who has first governed himself well, who possesses knowledge gained from experience in all things, who does not love himself, and who does not shy away from calumnies.

Whenever in your path you find unchanging peace, beware: you are very far from the divine paths trodden by the weary feet of the saints. For as long as you are journeying in the way to the city of the Kingdom and are drawing nigh to the city of God, this will be a sign for you: the strength of the temptations that you encounter. And the nearer you draw nigh and progress, the more temptations will multiply against you.

Whenever, therefore, you perceive in your soul diverse and stronger temptations in your path, know that at that time your soul has in fact secretly entered a new and higher level, and that grace has been added to her in the state wherein she was found; for God leads the soul into the afflictions of trials in exact proportion to the magnitude of the grace He bestows. Yet I speak not of worldly trials that come upon some in order to bridle their wickedness and their manifestly evil deeds, nor yet of bodily disturbances, but of trials that are

suitable to monks dwelling in stillness; these we shall specify later.

But if a man's soul has an infirmity and has not strength enough for great temptations, and she therefore asks that she should not enter into them, and God hearkens to her, then know for a certainty that
[209] inasmuch as the soul is insufficient for great trials, in the same measure is she insufficient for great gifts; and in so far as great temptations are prevented from entering upon the soul, to the same degree great gifts are withheld from her.

For God does not grant a great gift without a great trial. In His wisdom, which is beyond the understanding of His creatures, God has ordained that gifts be bestowed in proportion to temptations. You may comprehend, therefore, from the difficult afflictions which befall you through God's providence, the degree of the gift your soul has received from His majesty. And in proportion to the affliction, consolation is given.

Question Does, then, the trial come first and afterward the gift, or the gift first and the trial follow behind it?

Answer A trial does not come unless the soul has first secretly received both a portion greater than the measure which she had formerly received and the Spirit of grace. The Lord's temptation and the trials of the apostles testify to the truth of this, for they were not permitted to enter into temptation until they had received the Comforter. It is fitting that those who partake of good should endure also their trials, because their affliction is mingled together with the good, for so it was pleasing to the wise God to do. And if it happens so – that is, that a gift is before trial – nevertheless it is most certain that for the testing of a man's freedom, his awareness of temptations precedes his awareness of a gift; for grace never enters a man before he has tasted temptations. Hence, in reality grace comes first, but in the awareness of the senses, it delays [*to manifest itself*].

At the time of these trials we should have within us two contradictory things which are wholly unlike each other. These are joy and fear. Joy, because we are found in the path trodden by the saints, or rather, by Him Who gives life to all things; and this becomes evident to us when we carefully discern our temptations. But we should have fear because perhaps we are being tried through these things by reason of our pride. Humble-hearted men, however, are made wise by

grace to be able to discern all such things, and to know what kind of trial is the fruit of pride, and what kind of trial is a blow inflicted by divine love. For the trials resulting from a man's diligent practice, struggle, and progress in good differ from trials that are permitted to come upon a man for his chastisement because of the pride of his heart.

The trials of the friends of God, that is to say, the humble

The trials that are inflicted by the paternal rod for the soul's progress and growth, and wherein she may be trained, are the following: [210] sloth; oppressiveness of the body; enfeeblement of the limbs; despondency; confusion of mind; bodily pains; temporary loss of hope; darkening of thoughts; absence of help from men; scarcity of bodily necessities; and the like. By these temptations a man's soul feels herself lonely and defenseless, his heart is deadened and filled with humility, and he is trained thereby to come to yearn for his Creator. Yet divine providence proportions these trials to the strength and needs of those who suffer them. In them are mingled both consolation and griefs, light and darkness, wars and aid. In short, they straiten and enlarge. This is the sign of the increase of God's help.

The trials of the enemies of God, that is to say, the proud

But the trials that God allows to fall upon men who are shameless, whose thinking is exalted in the face of God's goodness, and who abuse His goodness in their pride, are the following: manifest temptations of the demons which also exceed the limit of the strength of men's souls; the withdrawal of the forces of wisdom which men possess; the piercing sensation of the thought of fornication which is allowed to assault them to humble their arrogance; quick temper; the desire to have one's own way; disputatiousness; vituperation; a scornful heart; complete delusion of the mind; blasphemy against the Name of God; absurd notions that are entirely ridiculous, or rather, lamentable; to be despised of men and to fall into complete dishonor; to be made by the demons, both openly and secretly by every kind of means, a disgrace and a reproach among men; the desire to mingle and have intercourse with the world; always to speak and behave foolishly; endlessly to seek out some new thing for oneself through

false prophecy; to promise many things that are beyond one's strength. These are the trials of the soul.

To the trials of the body which befall them belong: painful adversities, always prolonged, intricate, and difficult to resolve; constant encounters with wicked and godless men; to fall into the hands of men who afflict us; the heart's being suddenly seized (and always without reason) by terror; many times to stumble severely on rocks, and to have grave falls from high places, and similar mishaps which do the body great injury; and finally, the heart's being entirely destitute of reliance upon God's care and of the confidence of its faith. In brief, whatsoever is impossible and beyond the strength of such men
[211] comes upon them and those who dwell with them. These things which we have set forth and enumerated belong to the trials of pride.

Temptations of this sort commence in a man when he begins to appear wise in his own eyes; and to the extent that he accepts proud thoughts, he goes through all these evils. Therefore, you may comprehend the subtle pathways of your mind by the kinds of trials that beset you. But if you see that you have some of these trials mingled with the trials aforementioned,[1] then know that inasmuch as you have them, pride has broken in upon you.

On patience

Hear yet another consideration. Every adversity and affliction, if not accompanied by patience, produces double torment; for a man's patience casts off his distress, while faintness of heart is the mother of anguish. Patience is the mother of consolation and is a certain strength which is usually born of largeness of heart. It is hard for a man to find this strength in his tribulations without a gift from God, received through his ardent pursuit of prayer and the outpouring of his tears.

On faint-heartedness

When it is God's pleasure to subject a man to even greater afflictions, He permits him to fall into the hands of faint-heartedness. This begets in him a mighty force of despondency, wherein he feels his soul to be suffocated. This is a foretaste of Gehenna. From this there

1. I.e. the trials of the humble.

is unleashed upon him: the spirit of distraction (from which ten thousand trials gush forth); confusion; wrath; blasphemy; protesting and bewailing one's lot; perverted thoughts; wandering from place to place; and the like. And if you should ask what the cause of these things is, I answer that it is you yourself, for the reason that you have not taken pains to find the remedy for them.

The remedy for them all is one, and therein, in its very hand, a man can find immediate consolation for his soul. And what is it? Humility of heart. Without this, no man can destroy the barrier of these evils, nay rather, he will see them triumph over him.

Do not be angry with me that I tell you the truth. You have never [212] sought out humility with your whole soul. But if you wish, enter into its realm, and you will see how it disperses your wickedness. For in proportion to your humility you are given patience in your woes; and in proportion to your patience the burden of your afflictions is made lighter and you will find consolation; in proportion to your consolation, your love of God increases; and in proportion to your love, your joy in the Holy Spirit is magnified.

Once men have truly become His sons, our tenderly compassionate Father does not take away their temptations from them when it is His pleasure to 'make for them a way to escape,' but instead He gives 1 Cor. 10:13 His sons patience in their trials. All these good things are given into the hand of their patience for the perfecting of their souls. May Christ God deem us worthy by His grace with a thankful heart to be patient in evils for His love's sake. Amen.

Homily 43

An explanation of the modes of discipline: what is the force of each, and what is the difference of each

BODILY DISCIPLINE performed in stillness purifies the body of the matter within it.

But the discipline of the mind humbles the soul, filters out her crass notions of things that perish, and draws her from the state where the thoughts are passionately engrossed to the state where they are moved by her divine vision. This divine vision brings her close to the nakedness of the understanding which is called immaterial *theoria*.

And this is the spiritual discipline. For it lifts up the understanding from earthly things, brings it close to the spirit's pristine *theoria*, and presents it to God through the divine vision of that unutterable pristine glory (and this is a movement of the conceptions of His nature's majesty), and separates it from this world and the awareness thereof. By this we are thoroughly convinced of our hope which is laid up for us, and we stand in full assurance of its state. This is the 'persuasion' of which the Apostle spoke, that is, the divine assurance by which the mind is noetically gladdened in that hope which has been promised us. But hear what things these are, and in what each of them subsists.

Col. 1:5

Gal. 5:8

The bodily discipline that is according to God is called bodily labors done to purify the flesh through practising virtue in visible deeds, by which the impurity of the flesh is filtered out.

Noetic discipline is a work of the heart carried on without pause in pondering upon judgment, that is, upon God's righteousness and the judgments He has decreed; unceasing prayer of the heart; mindfulness of the providence and care of God active in this world particularly and universally at once; and a watching for secret passions, lest you encounter any of them in the secret and spiritual realm. This work of the heart is called the noetic discipline. By the work of this discipline, which is also called the righteous activity of the soul, the

heart is refined and is separated from communion with the corruption of passions contrary to nature. Because of this fineness and separation, she begins to be moved at all times by an understanding of sensory things, which were created for the body's use and growth and, through whose ministry, vigor is given to the four elements in the body.

But spiritual discipline is an activity apart from the senses. This is the discipline written about by the Fathers, namely that whenever the minds of the saints receive hypostatic *theoria*, then even the body's grossness is taken away, and from thenceforward their vision becomes spiritual. Now 'hypostatic *theoria*' refers to the created state of [*man's*] primordial nature.[1] And from this hypostatic vision a man is easily moved and led up to what is called unitary knowledge which is, in plain terms, awestruck wonder at God. This is the state of the majestical way of life to come, which is granted in the freedom of immortal life in existence after the resurrection. There human nature never ceases from its awestruck wonder at God, and entertains no thought at all concerning created beings.

For if anything else were like unto God, the mind would also move itself toward it, being at times in God, and at times in it; but since all the beauty of things to exist in the newness to come is inferior to His beauty, how can the understanding depart from the beauty of God by its [*faculty of*] divine vision? What, then? Does such a man sorrow at mortality? Nay, at the heaviness of the flesh? Nay, at remembrance of kindred? Nay, at the constraint of nature? Nay, at misfortunes? Nay, at adversities? At the unconscious wandering of his thoughts? At the imperfection of nature? At wandering motions of the elements? At the chance visit of another man? At despondency? At the body's wearisome toil? In no wise.

But even though all these things occur in the world, yet at the moment when the veil of the passions is lifted from the eyes of his mind and a man espies that glory, his understanding is straightway exalted [215] in awestruck astonishment. But if God had not set a limit on such wonders in this life with regard to how long a man may linger in

1. This seems to mean that *hypostatic theoria* is the vision that human nature possessed in its primordial state, i.e. before the fall. See also p. 134, and note 6 on *limpid purity*.

them, and moreover, if they were permitted him throughout his whole life, he would never come away from his divine vision of them. How much more so, then, should this be the case there, where all these things we have just mentioned do not exist (for that virtue is without limit), and we shall be in reality and hypostatically within the King's courts, if we are deemed worthy of it because of our discipline!

How, then, is our mind able to come away again, and remove itself from that wonderful and divine vision, and fall into other matters? Woe unto us! For we neither know our own souls, nor to what mode of life we have been called; and this life of infirmity, this estate of beasts, the world's tribulations, and this world itself and its ills and consolations, these we count as something!

A Prayer Wherefore, O Christ, Who alone art mighty, 'blessed is
Ps. 83:6 the man whose help is from Thee; he hath made ascents in his heart!' Lord, turn Thou our faces away from the world by the desire of Thee, that we may see it for what it is, and no longer believe in a shadow as in truth. Fashion us anew, O Lord, and renew and give our mind zeal before death, so that in the hour of our departure we may know the purpose of our entrance and departure from this world. And so, having finished that work for which Thy will first called us to come into this life, may we then hope, with our mind full of confidence, to receive those great things which, according to the Scrip-
1 Cor. 2:9 tures' promise, Thy love hath prepared in the second, new creation, things the remembrance of which is guarded in the faith of Thy mysteries.

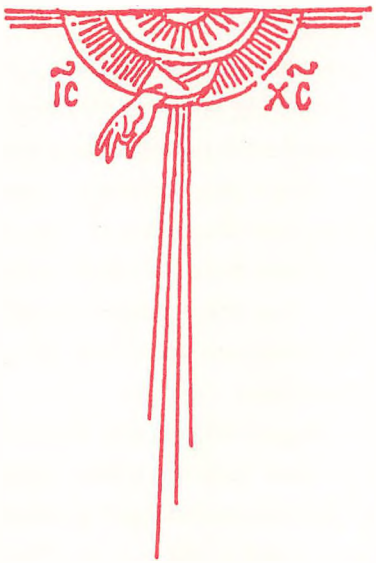
On the purification of the body, the soul, and the mind

Purification of the body is holiness free of the defilement of the flesh.

Purification of the soul is freedom from secret passions concentrated in a man's thinking.

But purification of the mind comes to pass by the revelation of mysteries. For it is cleansed of all things that fall under the reach of sensation because of their grossness. Little children, too, are chaste of body and passionless of soul, yet no one calls them purified in mind. For purity of the mind is perfection through the exercise of heavenly

divine visions, when the mind is moved without the senses by the spiritual powers of those worlds on high which possess wonders without number. These beings are distinct in their modes of existence but united in their invisible ministry, which consists in the motion of the divine revelations that are perpetual in their alterations at all times. May our God Himself make us worthy always to behold Him with the nakedness of our understanding, and hereafter, without mediation, unto the ages of ages. His be the glory. Amen. [216]



Homily 44

An epistle of our Father among the Saints Isaac the Syrian written to a certain brother possessed of the love of stillness, on how the devil contrives to make those who constantly endeavor to practise stillness to desist from their constant stillness by means of the love of a relative or honored men, and on how it behooves the hesychast to disdain all things for the sake of the knowledge of God which is to be found in stillness, even as it has been shown in the case of our Fathers of old

BECAUSE I KNOW that you love stillness, O good brother, and that the devil, knowing your mind's intention, entangles you in many affairs under the pretext of accomplishing good, until he should completely divert you and hinder you from that virtue[1] which embraces many good disciplines, I was anxious to aid your good desire with a profitable word, as one limb helps its fellow limb. For this reason, then, I have taken pains to set down a few things I have gathered from men wise in virtue, from the Scriptures, from the Fathers, and from experience.

If a man does not despise honors and dishonors, and if, for the sake of stillness, he does not patiently endure reproach, mocking, injury, and even blows and become a laughing-stock, considered by all who see him to be a fool and a half-wit, he cannot persevere in the good aim of stillness. For if a man only once opens the door to the causes, the devil will not cease to bring him men and continual, innumerable encounters under every pretext.

Therefore, my brother, if you love the life of genuine stillness which knows no diversion, break, or interruption in its course (by this the men of old became victorious), you will accomplish your praiseworthy desire by imitating your Fathers and by retaining in your mind the history of their lives. For those of them who loved perfect stillness were not concerned with preserving the love of their neighbors by means of familiarity, nor did they endeavor to extend

1. I.e. stillness.

themselves so as to give the latter comfort, nor were they ashamed to avoid association with persons reputed to be in honor.

These men made their way in this manner, and those who were wise and knowledgeable did not judge them to be despisers of their brethren, or scorners, or negligent, or lacking discretion. This was also affirmed by one of them as a defense of whoever esteems stillness and withdrawal above association with men. 'The man,' he says, 'who through experience learns the sweetness of stillness in his cell, does not avoid meeting his neighbor because he despises him, but on account of the fruit he harvests from stillness.'

How was it that Abba Arsenius fled and was not pleased to meet any man? And Abba Theodore, though he met men, his meeting was like a sharp sword, and he greeted no one when he was found outside his cell.[2] And Abba Arsenius did not even greet those who came to him to salute him. Once one of the fathers went to see Abba Arsenius, and the elder, thinking he was the brother who served him, opened the door to him. Yet when the elder saw who it was, he threw himself upon his face; and although the other father greatly entreated him to stand up and merely to bless him and thus he would depart, the saint refused, saying, 'I shall not get up until you have departed.'[3] The blessed one did this, lest once having stretched out his hand to them, men should return again to him.

But consider also what follows in the narration, lest perhaps you should say that Abba Arsenius despised the man (and others as well) on account of his lowly estate, whereas he showed partiality to another because of the honor which the latter enjoyed. For in very truth he fled equally from all, both small and great. He had one thing only before his eyes: to despise association with both great and small alike for the sake of stillness and to endure the reproach of all men against him in honor of stillness and silence.

For we know well how the blessed Theophilus, the Archbishop [*of Alexandria*], visited him in the company of the judge of that place, because of their desire to see him and to enjoy that honor. But when he sat before them, he did not comfort them even with a single word on account of their honorable estate, though they longed to hear many words from him. And when the Archbishop entreated him con-

2. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 11, #29.

3. Ibid. p. 6, #13.

cerning this, the monk was silent for a moment, and then said, 'If I tell you something, will you observe it?' And they consented, saying, 'Yes.' Whereupon the elder said to them, 'Wherever you hear that Arsenius is found, do not draw nigh to that place.'[4] Do you see how
[219] marvellous the elder was? Do you see his shunning of association with men? This is the man who harvests the fruit of stillness! For the blessed one did not take into account that this was a Catholicos[5] and a head of the Church, but he deliberated within himself, 'I have died once and for all to the world; what profit is a dead man to the living?' Even Abba Macarius reproached him with a reproach filled with love, saying, 'Why do you flee from us?' And the elder made his defense with a wonderful and praiseworthy defense, saying, 'God knows that I love you, but I cannot be with both God and men.'[6]

Another time the Archbishop sent him word that he might see him, and the elder sent him his reply, saying, 'If you come, I shall open to you; but if I open to you, I shall open to all men; and if I open to all, I shall not be able to remain in this place.'[7] He did not learn this wonderful knowledge from anywhere else save from a divine voice which said to him, 'Arsenius, flee from men and be saved.'[8]

Let none of the idle and lovers of chatter be so audacious as to refute this and gainsay it with his objections, saying that it is a human invention, employed as an excuse for stillness; for this is a teaching from Heaven. But lest we should think that he was told to flee only so as to leave the world, but not to flee from his brethren as well, he once again prayed to God after he had abandoned the world and come to dwell in the Lavra, to learn how he should live rightly, and he said, 'Lord, guide me as to how I may be saved.' And he fancied that he would hear something different. But again he heard the Master's voice a second time, saying: 'Arsenius, flee, be silent, be still. Though the sight and intercourse of the brethren be very profitable, yet association with them will not profit you so much as to flee from them.'[9]

When the blessed Arsenius received in a divine revelation the command to flee, he was in the world; and when he was with the brethren, again the same was told to him; he then received assurance

4. Ibid. p. 14, #52
5. *Catholicos* is a title equivalent to *Patriarch*.
6. Budge, PHF, Vol. II, p. 14, #53.
7. Ibid. p. 203, #235.
8. Ibid. p. 3, #1.
9. Ibid. p. 3, #2.

and knew that it was not sufficient to flee only from the men of the world, but he must flee from all alike in order to achieve the good way of life. For could any man oppose or speak against the voice of God? And it was also said to the divine Anthony in a revelation, 'If you wish to practise stillness, withdraw not only to the Thebaïd, but even to the inner desert.'[10]

If, therefore, God commands us to flee from all men and thus to love stillness, since those who love Him persevere in stillness, who then should make excuses in order to remain in the intercourse and vicinity of men? If flight and watchfulness is profitable for Anthony and Arsenius, how much more is it for the infirm? And if God esteemed the stillness of these men – whose words, presence, and help the whole world was in need of – higher than succor given to all the [220] brethren, nay rather, to all mankind, how much more will this be the case with the man who is unable perfectly to guard himself?

We know of another saint whose brother after the flesh, a recluse in another cell, fell ill. During the whole period of his brother's sickness he restrained his compassion and did not go forth to visit him. Now at the time of his departing from this life, his brother sent word to him, saying, 'Though you have not yet come to me, come even now, though it be during the night, and I shall see you before my departure from the world and embrace you, and I shall be at peace.' But that blessed man was not persuaded, not even at that hour when nature is wont to be compassionate to other men and to overstep the limit set by the will. He said, 'If I go out, my heart will not be pure before God, because I have neglected to visit my spiritual brothers, whereas I would have honored nature above Christ.' And his brother died and did not see him.[11]

Let no one, therefore, by reason of his indolent thoughts make the excuse that these things are impossible, and dismiss them, and bring to naught his stillness, having scorned God's providence on his behalf. If the saints overcame nature, whose bonds are so strong, and Christ loves to see stillness honored by holy men, even though they neglect His children, then what other necessity could befall you, which you could not despise when it encompasses you? The com-

10. See the *Life of St. Anthony* by St. Athanasius the Great, §49.
11. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 233, #395.

mandment that says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy
Matt. 22:37 heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,' more than the world, nature, and all that pertains thereto, is fulfilled when you patiently endure in your stillness. And the commandment that speaks of the love of neighbor is included within the former.

Do you wish to acquire in your soul the love of your neighbor according to the commandment of the Gospel? Separate yourself from him, and then the heat and flame of the love of him will burn in you and you will rejoice over the sight of his countenance as though you beheld an angel of light. And do you wish that those who love you should thirst for you? See their faces on fixed days only. Truly, experience is the teacher of all. Farewell.

Homily 45

An epistle of our Father among the Saints Isaac the Syrian to his natural and spiritual brother, who, dwelling in the world and thirsting to see him, exhorted and entreated the saint by letters to come to visit him in inhabited parts

WE ARE NOT SO STRONG AS YOU THINK, O blessed one, and perchance you are ignorant of my weakness, because you reckon my destruction as a slight thing. For this reason you continually beseech me (being fired up by nature, as nature is wont to do) for a thing about which we should have no concern and to which you should pay no heed. This alone do not ask of me: what gives comfort to the flesh and the mind thereof; but rather, my brother, be solicitous for the salvation of my soul. In a short time we shall pass out of this world. Rom. 8:6

How many people would I be obliged to meet if I went thither? How many practices of men and diverse places would I see, until I returned to my own place? How many causes of thoughts would my soul assimilate by encountering these things? And how much confusion would she undergo on account of the passions that would be awakened in her, from which she had found a little repose? And you are not ignorant of this. For the sight of the worldly, not only of women, but of men also, is extremely harmful for a monk, and you know this.

Observe what a great change comes to pass in the mind of a man who has passed a long time practising stillness by himself, when suddenly he chances upon these things and sees and hears what he is unaccustomed to see and hear. If even a meeting with monks whose state does not correspond with his own injures the monk who is engaged in the struggle and still wages war with his adversary, how shall we not fall into a great pit and be transfixed by the darts of our foe? Therefore, so that we may be delivered from the arrows of the enemy, understand into what a pit we should fall, especially those of

us who have gained knowledge through much experience. For this reason do not entreat me to do this thing without necessity.

Let not our heart be deceived by those who say that we are not harmed by hearing and seeing something, that with respect to our thoughts we are the same in the desert and in the world, in our cell and without, that by reason of our repose from turmoil we are not subject to a change for the worse, and that we do not sense any disturbance arising from the passions because of our encounter with persons and things. Those who say these things do not even know when they are struck a blow. For we have not yet attained to such a degree of health of soul. We have stinking wounds, and if they are left uncared for and unbandaged even for one day, and plasters are not applied to them, and they are not bound tightly, they will breed worms.

Homily 46

Containing profitable subjects replete with the wisdom of the Spirit

FAITH IS THE DOOR TO MYSTERIES. What the bodily eyes are to sensory objects, the same is faith to the eyes of the understanding that gaze at hidden treasures. Even as we have two bodily eyes, we possess two eyes of the soul, as the Fathers say; yet both have not the same operation with respect to divine vision. With one we see the hidden glory of God which is concealed in the natures of things; that is to say, we behold His power, His wisdom, and His eternal providence for us, which we understand from the magnitude of His governance on our behalf. With this same eye we also behold the heavenly orders of our fellow servants. With the other, we behold the glory of His holy nature. When God is pleased to admit us to spiritual mysteries, He opens wide the sea of faith in our minds.

Repentance is given to the sons of men as grace after grace, for repentance is a second regeneration by God. That of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance. Repentance is the door of mercy, opened to those who seek it. By this door we enter into the mercy of God, and apart from this entrance we shall not find mercy. 'For all have sinned,' according to divine Scripture, 'being justified freely by His grace.' Repentance is the second grace and is begotten in the heart by faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod that guides our way until we reach the spiritual paradise of good things; and when we have attained thereto, it leaves us and turns back.

Rom. 3:23, 24

Paradise is the love of God, wherein is the enjoyment of all blessedness, and there the blessed Paul partook of supernatural nourishment. When he tasted there of the tree of life, he cried out, saying, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.' Adam was barred from this tree through the devil's counsel.

1 Cor. 2:9

The tree of life is the love of God from which Adam fell away, and thereafter he saw joy no longer, and he toiled and labored in the land of thorns. Even though they make their way in righteousness, those who are bereft of the love of God eat in their work the bread of sweat, which the first-created man was commanded to eat after his
Gen. 3:19 fall. Until we find love, our labor is in the land of thorns, and in the midst of thorns we both sow and reap, even if our seed is the seed of righteousness, and in every hour we are pricked by the thorns, and however much we render ourselves righteous, we live by the sweat of our brow.

But when we find love, we partake of heavenly bread, and are made strong without labor and toil. The heavenly bread is Christ,
John 6:50 Who came down from Heaven and gave life to the world. This is the nourishment of the angels.

The man who has found love eats and drinks Christ every day and hour and hereby is made immortal. 'He that eateth of this bread,' He
John 6:58 says, 'which I will give him, shall not see death unto eternity.' Blessed is he who eats the bread of love, which is Jesus! He who eats of love eats Christ, the God over all, as John bears witness, saying, 'God is
1 John 4:8 love.'

Wherefore, the man who lives in love reaps life from God, and while yet in this world, he even now breathes the air of the resurrection; in this air the righteous will delight in the resurrection. Love is the Kingdom, whereof the Lord mystically promised His disciples to eat in His Kingdom. For when we hear Him say, 'Ye shall eat and
Luke 22:30 drink at the table of My Kingdom,' what do we suppose we shall eat, if not love? Love is sufficient to nourish a man instead of food and drink.

Ps. 103:16 This is the wine that 'maketh glad the heart of man.' Blessed is he who drinks of this wine! Profligates have drunk this wine and felt shame;[1] sinners have drunk it and have forgotten the pathways of stumbling; drunkards have drunk this wine and become fasters; the rich have drunk it and desired poverty; the poor have drunk it and been made rich with hope; the sick have drunk it and become strong; the unlearned have taken it and been made wise.

1. The Syriac word also means *became chaste*.

As it is not possible to cross over the great ocean without a ship, so no one can attain to love without fear. This fetid sea, which lies between us and the noetic paradise, we can cross with the boat of repentance, whose oarsmen are those of fear. But if the oarsmen of fear do not pilot this barque of repentance wherewith we cross over the sea of this world to God, we shall be drowned in the fetid sea. Repentance is the ship, and fear is the pilot; love is the divine haven.

Thus fear sets us in the ship of repentance, transports us over the foul sea of this life (that is, of the world), and guides us to the divine [225] port, which is love. Hither proceed all that labor and are afflicted and heavy laden in repentance. When we attain to love, we attain to God. Matt. 11:28 Our way is ended and we have passed unto the isle that lies beyond the world, where is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to Whom be glory and dominion, and may He make us worthy of His glory and His love through the fear of Him. Amen.

Homily 47

On how great are the measures of knowledge and the measures pertaining to faith

THERE IS A KNOWLEDGE THAT PRECEDES FAITH, and there is a knowledge born of faith. Knowledge that precedes faith is natural knowledge; and that which is born of faith is spiritual knowledge. What is natural knowledge? Knowledge is natural that discerns good from evil, and this is also called natural discernment, by which we know to discern good from evil naturally, without being taught. God has implanted this in rational nature, and with teaching it receives growth and assistance; there is no one who does not have it.

This power of natural knowledge is a rational soul's discernment of good and evil, which is constantly active in her. Those who have been deprived of it are inferior to rational nature, but those who possess it stand aright in their soul's nature, and do not have any deficiency in those things that God has granted their nature to honor its rationality. The prophet reproaches those who have destroyed this insight which discerns good from evil, saying, 'Man, being in honor,
Ps. 48:12 did not understand.'

The honor belonging to rational nature is the discernment that tells good from evil, and those who have destroyed it are justly com-
Ibid. pared to 'mindless cattle,' which have no rational and discerning faculty. With this discernment it is possible for us to find the pathway of God. This is knowledge that is natural; this is the predecessor of faith; and this is the pathway to God. By it we know to discern good from evil and to accept faith. The power of nature attests that it behooves man to believe in Him Who brings forth all things in His creation, to believe the words of His commandments, and to do them. From this belief is born the fear of God. When a man joins righteous works to the fear of God and makes a little progress in this activity,

the fear of God gives birth to spiritual knowledge, which we have said is born of faith.

Natural knowledge, which is the discernment of good and evil implanted in our nature by God, persuades us that we must believe in God, the Author of all. Faith produces fear in us, and fear compels us to repent and to set ourselves to work. And thus man is given spiritual knowledge, which is the perception of mysteries, and this perception engenders the faith of true divine vision. Yet spiritual knowledge is not thus simply begotten of mere faith alone; but faith begets the fear of God, and when we begin to act from the fear of God, then, out of the steady action of the fear of God, spiritual knowledge is born, just as Saint John Chrysostom has said, 'For when a man acquires a will that conforms to the fear of God and to right thinking, he quickly receives the revelation of hidden things.' And by 'revelation of hidden things' he means spiritual knowledge.

It is not, however, the fear of God that gives birth to this spiritual knowledge (because what is not inherent in a nature cannot be engendered by it), but rather this knowledge is conferred as a gift upon that working which belongs to the fear of God. As soon as you search well into the work of the fear of God, you will find this to be repentance, and from this arises spiritual knowledge. Concerning this we have written, 'That of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance.'[1] And the gift which we said we shall receive by means of repentance is spiritual knowledge, which is conferred as a gift through the work of the fear of God. But spiritual knowledge is the perception of what is hidden. And when a man perceives these invisible and by far more excellent things (from which it takes the name spiritual knowledge), then, through the perception proper to this knowledge, another faith is begotten, not one that is opposed to the first faith, but one that confirms it. And this is called 'the faith of divine vision.' Until then, hearing; but now, divine vision. But vision is more certain than hearing.

Rom. 10:17; Job 42:5

All these things are born of that knowledge inherent in nature which discerns good from evil. This is the good seed of virtue, and concerning it we have spoken. When we veil this natural knowledge

1. Homily 46, p. 357.

by means of our pleasure-loving will, we forfeit all these good things. Natural knowledge is accompanied by a continual pricking of conscience, an unceasing remembrance of death, and a certain anxiety which is a torment until a man departs from this life. Afterward come: sorrow, sadness, fear of God, shame proper to nature, grieving over all former sins, diligence in our duties, remembrance of our common path and concern over provisions for it, supplication of God with mourning to make a good entry in at that gate through which all
[228] nature passes, contempt for the world, and a great struggle for virtue.

All these good things are found through natural knowledge. So, let every man compare his works with these. For when a man is found amid these things, he is walking on the path that is natural. But when he surmounts them and attains to love, he is raised above nature, and the struggle, the fear, the toil, and the weariness in all things he does, pass away from him. These things are consequences of natural knowledge, and we find them in ourselves when we do not veil it by means of our pleasure-loving will. We are amid these things until we attain to love, which frees us from them all.

Let a man compare himself with what has been said, and let him examine himself to see in what manner of things he is making his way: in those that are contrary to nature, in those that are natural, or in those that are above nature. From the indications mentioned, a man can clearly and quickly discover the governing trait of his entire life. When he does not find himself amid the things which we have here defined as natural, and he is not in those which are above nature, then it is plain that he has cast himself into things contrary to nature. But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 48

Containing counsels replete with profit, which he spoke with love to those who listened to him humbly

A GOOD NOTION FALLS INTO THE HEART only by a divine gift, and an evil thought approaches the soul only for the sake of temptation and trial. The man who has reached the knowledge of the extent of his weakness has reached perfect humility.

That which leads the gifts of God to a man is a heart that is continually moved to thanksgiving; that which leads trials to the soul is a murmuring disposition always active in the heart. God bears with all the weaknesses of men, but He will not suffer to leave without chastisement a man who murmurs continually. A soul that is devoid of every illumination of knowledge will be found in such dispositions. A mouth that always renders thanks receives a blessing from God, and grace descends into the heart that perseveres in thanksgiving.

Humility runs in advance of grace, and conceit runs in advance of chastisement. He that has become proud because of knowledge is permitted to fall into blasphemy; he that is lifted up by his practice of virtue is permitted to fall into fornication; and he who is filled with presumption because of his own wisdom is permitted to fall into the murky snares of ignorance.

The man who has no recollection of God whatever carries in his heart suspicion of his neighbor through wicked recollections. But he that honors every man because of his recollection of God receives help from every man by God's secret command.

He who speaks in defense of a man who suffers injustice has God as his Champion. He who lends his arm to help his neighbor receives the arm of God as his Helper. He who accuses his brother on account of his evil deeds has God for his own Accuser. A man who corrects his brother in his private chamber cures his evil; but a man who makes accusation against another in a public gathering worsens his

wounds. He who cures his brother in secret makes manifest the strength of his love; but he who puts his brother to shame in the eyes of his companions gives a proof of the strength of his envy. A friend who rebukes another in secret is a wise physician; but he who wishes to cure in the eyes of many is in reality a reviler.

A sign of compassion is forgiveness of every debt; a sign of an evil mind is offensive speech to one who has fallen. The man who administers chastisement with a view to healing, chastises with love; but he who seeks vengeance is devoid of love. God chastises with love, not for the sake of revenge – far be it! – but seeking to make whole His image. And He does not harbor wrath until a time when correction is no longer possible, for He does not seek vengeance for Himself. This is the aim of love. Love's chastisement is for correction, and it does not aim at retribution.

A righteous man that is wise is like unto God, for he never chastises a man to requite and avenge his wickedness, but to correct him, or so that others might fear. That, however, which does not resemble this is not chastisement. Now hereby the Spirit depicts, as in an image, the mind that God has had everlastingly. But the man who chooses to consider God an avenger, presuming that [*in this manner*] he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being devoid of goodness. Far be it, that vengeance could ever be found in that Fountain of love and Ocean brimming with goodness! The purpose of His mind is the correction of men; and if it were not that we should be stripped of the honor of our free will, perhaps He would not even heal us by reproof.[1] The boundary of free will in our deeds is the power that boldness bestows on our reason; and reason also ought to worship the greatness of His goodness, for He wills that we should rejoice not as it were in what is His, but as it were in the recompenses of our own deeds. For although all things are His, yet He is not pleased that we should consider them His, but that we should delight in what is His as if it were ours.

In proportion to a man's goodness, he is enlightened concerning God; and in proportion as he is drawn up to the knowledge of Him, he approaches freedom of soul.

1. I.e. God would heal us even against our will, forcibly, if this would not deprive us of free will.

He who does good for the sake of future reward, changes quickly. But the man who, on the strength of his knowledge, wonders at the vision of God's love will neither become uplifted in his mind, nor will he ever turn aside from virtue, even though his flesh be cut to pieces.

He whose mind is illumined concerning the recompenses which God bestows upon us descends into the depth of humility in both body and soul. For before a man can approach knowledge he must ascend and descend in his manner of life; but when he actually draws nigh to knowledge, he is altogether raised on high. However much he is exalted, his ascent in knowledge will not be completed until that age of glory comes, and then he will receive the full measure of his riches. The more a man becomes perfect with respect to God, the more he follows after Him. But in the age of truth, God will show him His face, although not His essence. For however much the righteous enter into the divine vision of Him, they behold an enigma of His vision, like an image that is seen through a mirror; but yonder they behold the revelation of the truth. [231] 1 Cor. 13:12

Fire that has flared up in dry wood is difficult to put out, and the flame of divine fervor that descends into the heart of him who has renounced the world will not be extinguished, and it is fiercer than fire. When the power of wine enters the members, it makes the mind oblivious of the precise [*nature*] of all things; and when the memory of God takes possession of a pasture in the soul, it causes every memory of visible things to vanish from the heart. A mind that has found spiritual wisdom is like a man who finds a fully equipped ship at sea, and once he has gone aboard, it brings him from the sea of this world to the isle of the age to come. In like manner, the perception of the future age while in this world is like an islet in the ocean; and he who approaches it toils no longer amid the billows of the appearances of this age.

When a merchant has finished his business, he hastens homeward. And so long as a monk has not completed his term for righteous labor, he suffers anguish at the thought of departing from his body; but when he perceives in his soul that he has redeemed his time and received his earnest, then he longs to see the age to come. While the merchant is at sea, he has fear in his members, lest the waves should rise against him and engulf the hope of his labor. And so long as a Eph. 5:16 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 1:14

monk is in this world his life is dominated by fear, lest a tempest should suddenly rise up against him and destroy the work at which he has labored from youth to old age. A merchant fixes his eye upon dry land, and a monk upon the hour of his death.

When a sailor voyages in the midst of the sea, he watches the stars, and in relation to them he guides his ship until he reaches harbor. But a monk watches prayer, because it sets him right and directs his course to that harbor toward which his discipline should lead. A monk gazes at prayer at all times, so that it might show him an island where he can anchor his ship and take on provisions; then once more he sets his course for another island. Such is the voyage of a monk in this life: he sails from one island to another, that is, from knowledge to knowledge, and by his successive change of islands, that is, of states of knowledge, he progresses until he emerges from the sea and his journey attains to that true city, whose inhabitants no longer engage in commerce but each rests upon his own riches. Blessed is the man who has not lost his course in this vain world, on this great sea! Blessed is the man whose ship has not broken up and who has reached harbor with joy!

A swimmer dives naked into the sea until he finds a pearl; and a
[232] wise monk, stripped of everything, journeys through life until he finds in himself the Pearl, Jesus Christ; and when he finds Him, he does not seek to acquire anything else besides Him. A pearl is kept in a vault, and a solitary's delight is preserved within stillness. A virgin is harmed in gatherings and crowds of people, and the mind of a monk in conversation with many men. A bird, wherever it may be, hastens back to its nest, there to hatch its young; and a monk possessing discernment hastens to his cell, there to produce the fruit of life. A serpent guards its head when its body is being crushed, and a wise solitary guards his faith at all times, for this is the origin of his life. A cloud obscures the sun, and much talk obscures the soul which has begun to be illuminated by the divine vision of prayer.

The bird called the heron rejoices and is glad, so wise men say, when it separates itself from the inhabited world and goes to a desert place and nests there; so the soul of a solitary is filled with celestial joy when she takes leave of mankind and goes to dwell in the land of stillness and there awaits the hour of her departure. It is said of the

bird called the siren, that every man who hears the melody of its voice is so captivated, that he follows it into the desert and forgets life itself by reason of the sweetness of its song, and he falls to the ground and dies. This resembles what happens with the soul. For when the heavenly sweetness descends into her from the sweet melody of the oracles of God perceptibly penetrating into the mind, then the whole soul so runs after this, that she even forgets this corporeal life, deprives the body of its desires, and is raised up out of this life toward God. The life of this world is sweet to the man who lives it in a carnal manner, but not so sweet as separation from life to the man who separates himself by perception in God.

Unless a tree first sheds its old leaves, it cannot grow new shoots; and until a solitary casts out from his heart the memory of his former actions, he cannot bear new fruit and sprout new shoots in Jesus Christ. Wind ripens the fruits of trees, and the Spirit of God, the fruits of the soul. They say that in a shell, where a pearl is born, lightning produces a kind of spark and the shell receives substance [*for the pearl*] from the air, whereas until then it is ordinary flesh; and until a monk's heart receives the heavenly substance through perception, its labor remains ordinary, and its shell holds no fruit of consolation. The fruits of trees are hard, repugnant to the taste, and unfit for consumption until the sweetness that comes from the sun has fallen upon them. Even so the first labors of repentance are bitter and extremely repugnant, and they give the solitary no consolation until they receive the sweetness that comes from divine vision, which translates the heart from earthly things such that it even forgets itself.

A dog that licks a rasp drinks its own blood and does not know its own harm because of the sweetness of the blood; and a solitary who [233]
stoops to drink vainglory, consumes his life and does not perceive his harm because of the fleeting sweetness. Worldly glory is a reef in the sea covered by water; for as this lies unknown to the sailor until his vessel strikes it, bottoms out, is filled with water and sinks, so vainglory does to a man until it drowns and destroys him. The Fathers say of vainglory, that passions once conquered and cast out return again to a vainglorious soul.

A small cloud is wont to cover the disk of the sun, but after the cloud has passed, the sun shines very brilliantly; so a little despon-

dency is wont to cover the soul, but the joy that follows is great. The minstrel who plays a flute is not nourished by the sound of its melodies, and when he ceases to play, a greater hunger afflicts his belly. And sweet words [*chanted*] without works do not make a man full; and when he abandons them, he is the more confounded.

As it is impossible for a man to drink wine and not to exhale its odor from his mouth, so it is impossible that a man who is deemed worthy of spiritual consolation in his discipline and of a change of his state should not be recognized by a wise man. A heart that has received the heavenly seed is changed in its speech, changed in its thinking, changed in its way of life, changed in its senses. In all that pertains to him such a man is different from the rest of men, and he is like a man who slumbered and has arisen from sleep.

Do not approach the words of the mysteries contained in the divine Scriptures without prayer and beseeching God for help, but say: Lord, grant me to perceive the power in them! Reckon prayer to be the key to the true understanding of the divine Scriptures. When you desire to draw nigh to God with your heart, first show Him your yearning by bodily labors. For a man begins his discipline with these. The heart draws very near to God through the privation of necessaries and through struggling to eat only one kind of food while found in labors. Indeed, the Lord by this has laid the foundation of
Matt. 10:9, 10 perfection. Reckon idleness as the beginning of darkness of soul, garrulous gatherings as darkness upon darkness, and the second as an occasion for the first. For if even profitable words, spoken without measure, produce darkness, how much more so does vain talk? The soul is abased by an excess of lengthy conversations, even when they are held in the fear of God. Consider darkness of soul to be the producer of confusion. The darkening of the soul, however, originates from a disorderly way of life.

Measure and long duration in discipline enlighten the mind and drive away confusion. When the mind is made turbulent by disorderliness, it is dark. And when the mind is dark, the soul is confused. Good order generates peace; peace gives birth to light in the soul; and peace makes the pure air in the mind radiant. The more a man's heart
[234] draws near to wisdom, the more it receives joy from God. This is how a man can distinguish spiritual wisdom from worldly wisdom: a

man perceives in his soul that spiritual wisdom causes silence to reign within him, but worldly wisdom produces a fountain of distraction. When you have discovered spiritual wisdom, you will be filled with much humility, gentleness, and peace that holds sway over your thoughts; and as a result of this, your members will be at rest and be undisturbed by turmoil and wantonness. But when you have found the second wisdom, you will acquire pride in your thinking, unspeakably perverted thoughts, a disturbed mind, shameless and haughty senses.*

Do not imagine that a man who is fettered by things pertaining to the body will be able to possess boldness in prayer before God. The soul of a pinchpenny is bereft of wisdom, but the soul of a merciful man is made wise by the Spirit. As oil feeds the flame of a lamp, so mercy feeds knowledge in the soul. The key to divine gifts is given to the heart by love of neighbor; and in proportion to the heart's freedom from the bonds of the body, the door of knowledge opens before it. The soul's passage from one world to another world is the reception of insight. How beautiful and praiseworthy is the love of neighbor, if only its cares do not distract us from the love of God! How sweet is conversation with our spiritual brothers, if only together with it we can preserve our conversation with God! It is good, therefore, to undertake such things in so far as due measure permits, that is, so long as this does not serve as a cause for us to fall away from our hidden work – discipline and unceasing converse with God. The confusion of the latter is caused by the establishment of the former;[2] for the mind is not sufficient to maintain two forms of converse.

The sight of worldly people causes confusion in the soul that has renounced them for the sake of divine work. Continuous intercourse even with spiritual brothers causes harm, while the mere sight of worldly men from a distance causes the same. The encounters that the senses experience, however, do not hinder bodily labor. But he who wishes to reap joy from the peace of his mind by means of hidden endeavor will be troubled in the stillness of his heart even by voices, without the sight of anything. Inner mortification cannot exist without inactivity of the senses. Discipline of the body requires keen-

* Here the Syriac begins a new homily with the title *Other Maxims*.

2. I.e. converse with God is confused by constant converse with men.

ness of the senses, but discipline of the soul – keenness of the heart.

As the soul in its nature is better than the body, so the work of the soul is better than the work of the body. And just as in the beginning,
Gen. 2:7 the existence of the body preceded that of the soul, so the works of the body precede the labor of the soul. A small but always persistent discipline is a great force; for a soft drop, falling persistently, hollows out hard rock.

[235] When the spiritual man draws near to being resurrected within you, a deadness to all things will awaken in you, a joy will burn in your soul the like of which there is nothing in creation, and your thoughts will be confined within you by reason of the sweetness in your heart. But when the world is about to rise up in you again, your mind's distraction and the pettiness and instability of your thinking will increase. By the world I mean the passions that are engendered by distraction. When they are born and come to maturity, they become sins and kill a man. As children are not born without a mother, so passions are not born without distraction of the mind, and sin is not committed without converse with passions.

When patience greatly increases in our soul, it is a sign that we have secretly received the grace of consolation. The power of patience is stronger than the joyful thoughts that descend into the heart. Life in God is the downfall of the senses; when the heart lives, the senses fall away. The resurrection of the senses is the deadening of the heart; when the senses are quickened, it is a sign that the heart has died to God.

The conscience does not derive uprightness from the virtues practised among men. A virtue that a man performs in behalf of other men cannot purify the soul; still it is reckoned before God for the receiving of a reward for labor. A virtue that a man performs within himself, however, accomplishes both: it is reckoned for the receiving of recompense, and it produces purity. For this reason, separate yourself from the first [*mode of virtue*] by pursuing the second. If a man takes no concern for the latter and desists from the former, he suffers a manifest fall away from God. The second, however, can entirely fill the place of the first, without the first being performed at all. Be dead in this life, that you may be a free man in your deadness. Be dead to this world, that you may be liberated from laws; for not one of those

who observe them can perfectly fulfill them in this life. But the man who is dead in his life is free while he lives and lives while he is dead. Undue diligence in adorning words is recognized by God-given simplicity of heart. The soul that perceives the life that is above the body does not adorn herself for this world. But the man who has not discovered the former [*life*] will scarcely be able to despise the latter, and to despise it completely will be utterly impossible for him. If he forces himself to this, he will stir up great conflict against himself. But as soon as he has discovered that life, he will be able to renounce this one without conflict.

Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul, and they can injure her more than the demons. The demons are unable to act where the soul resides in light, that is, in the laudable labors of virtue. But the soul that is darkened guides even the demons to herself so as to commit every evil. If you compel your body when it is weak to labors that exceed its strength, you will heap darkness upon darkness on your soul and bring greater confusion upon her. But if you surrender a strong body to ease and idleness, every wickedness will be committed by the soul that dwells in it, even though a man greatly desires the good; for after a short time it will despoil the very concern that he had for the good. When the soul is drunken with the joy of hope and with the gladness which is in God, the body becomes insensible to tribulations, even if it be feeble. Then it can bear redoubled hardships without growing weary, and it enjoys and works together with the soul in her spiritual delight. Thus it is when the soul enters into spiritual joy even though the body may be weak. [236]

If you guard your tongue, my brother, God will give you the gift of compunction of heart so that in it you may see your soul, and thereby you will enter into spiritual joy. But if your tongue defeats you – believe me in what I say to you – you will never be able to escape from darkness. If you do not have a pure heart, at least have a pure mouth, as the blessed John said.

Whenever you wish to exhort someone toward the good, at first give comfort to his body and honor him with words of love. For nothing so persuades a man to feel shame, and causes him to exchange his evils for what is better, as the bodily benefactions and the honor which he receives from you. And a second means of persua-

sion is a man's diligent effort to make himself a laudable example. He who has succeeded in taking hold of himself by prayer and vigilance will easily be able to draw his neighbor to life, even without the toil of speaking and audible exhortation. Negligence and laxity, however, harm not only those who yield to them, but also those who observe them. No words can express how greatly that man is blessed who by diligent solicitude over himself can instill zeal in his neighbors for beautiful deeds and make the slothful feel shame by the very sight of him. The silent deed has more power to reform other men than solicitous words of rebuke conjoined with a lax way of life. For when you set yourself aright, you will help your neighbor to no small degree.

The more a man enters into the struggle for God's sake, the more his heart waxes bold in his prayer; and the more he is drawn away by many affairs, the more he is deprived of God's help. The soul that has rest from the vexation of the body will possess tranquillity in her thoughts. Be a free man with respect to your body, that you may be deemed worthy of the freedom of the spirit. Be yoked to your freedom, lest you be harnessed to the yoke of servitude to your enemies. If once you have manifested in yourself an image of dissolution from this life, then through repose from the dealings of life be completely dead, as presenting a likeness of that abolition to come, since every concern for material things will be abolished from you by death. Nei-
[237] ther fear nor grieve over the burning[3] of the body, for death will completely take it from you. Do not fear death, because God has made preparations to raise you above it. To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

3. I.e. from the passions.

Homily 49

On the angelic movement that is awakened in us by God's providence for the soul's advancement in things spiritual

THE FIRST THOUGHT that by God's loving-kindness descends into a man, that enters into his heart and guides his soul to life, is the thought of his departure from this nature. This thought is naturally followed by disdain for the world, and every good movement that leads a man to life enters him from this. And it is this that the divine power which accompanies man lays as a foundation when it wishes to manifest life in him. If he does not quench this thought by involvement in the affairs of life and by vain talk, and if he increases it in his soul by continual concentration within himself and by contemplating it, this thought will lead him to profound divine vision that no man can express.

Satan greatly abhors this thought and makes war with all his might to expunge it from man's heart. And if it were possible, he would give a man dominion over the whole world, could he but by this distraction erase this thought from his mind. And if he were able, as it was said, he would gladly do this, for the cunning one knows that if this thought abides in a man, his mind will no longer remain on this earth of delusion, and his machinations against him will not touch him.

Now we do not say this concerning that first thought which stirs in us the remembrance of death by reminding us, but concerning the fullness of this activity, which unshakeably establishes in a man the remembrance of death, and which, by his meditation upon it, brings him to a state of continual wonder. The former thought is corporeal, but the latter is a spiritual *theoria* and wondrous grace. This divine vision is clothed in fiery intuitions. He who possesses it will not gaze searchingly at the world again, nor will he cleave to his body.

In very truth, O beloved brethren, if God were to let loose this true *theoria* on mankind for but a short while, the world would be left without succeeding generations. This divine vision is a bond before

which nature cannot stand; and for the man who has received this meditation in his soul, it proves to be a God-given grace stronger than all the particular activities bestowed upon those found in the middle order, who desire repentance with an upright heart. It is given especially to those concerning whom God knows that they must truly withdraw from the world to a better life because of the good volition that He has found in them. But it increases and abides with them when they dwell in a secluded and solitary place.

Let us make entreaty for this divine vision in our prayers. Let us keep long vigils for the sake of it. And let us beseech the Lord with tears that He grant us this as a gift which has no equal. Let us no longer weary ourselves in the toil of this world. This is the commencement of the thoughts of life, and it perfects in a man the fullness of righteousness.

*On the second activity that works upon man**

When a man progresses in good discipline and succeeds in mounting the step of repentance, when he draws nigh to the experience of the divine vision that results from his righteous works, and when a gift from on high descends upon him that he may taste the sweetness of spiritual knowledge, a second activity after the first will arise.

First he becomes certain of God's providence for every man, he is illuminated by His love for creation, and he is filled with wonder at His governance of rational beings and His great care for them. This is the beginning of the sweetness of God and the fire of His love, which is kindled in the heart and consumes the passions of the soul and body. A man will be conscious of this power when, in all the natures in creation and in everything that he encounters, he ponders them with understanding, and searches them out, and discerns them in a spiritual manner.

Wherefore, through such zealous and divine diligence and through his good conscience a man begins to be stirred to divine love, and straightway he is made drunk by it as by wine; his limbs become limp, his mind stands still in awestruck wonder, and his heart follows God as a captive. He becomes, as I said, like a man drunk with wine. The
[240] more the inner senses grow strong, the more this divine vision gains

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

in strength. And the more a man struggles to live a righteous life, to be watchful, and to labor in reading and prayer, the more its power is established and made fast within him. In very truth, O brethren, a man comes to this at times when he does not remember himself, that he is clad with a body, and he does not know that he is found in this world.

The second activity is the beginning of spiritual *theoria* in man, and this is the beginning of every revelation in the understanding; by this activity the understanding grows and becomes powerful in hidden things, and by this the understanding advances to other revelations that surpass the nature of man. In a word, guided by the hand of the second activity, all divine *theoria* and all revelations of the Spirit that the saints receive in this world, and whatever gifts and revelations human nature can come to know in this life, pass over to a man. This is the root of our perception of our Creator. Blessed is the man who has kept well this good seed once it has fallen into his soul, and has given it increase, and has not lost it by scattering it in vain concerns and in the distractions of transient and fleeting things! But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 50

On the varying states of light and darkness that occur in the soul at all times, and her training in matters of the right and of the left

LET US SEE, my beloved, whether at the time of prayer we possess in our soul divine vision into the verses of psalmody and prayer. For this is born of true stillness. And let us not be troubled when we are found in darkness, especially if the cause of this is not in us. But reckon this as the work of God's providence for a reason which He alone knows. At times our soul is suffocated and is, as it were, amid the waves; and whether a man reads the Scriptures, or performs his liturgy, or approaches anything whatever, he receives darkness upon darkness. He leaves off [*prayer*] and cannot even approach it. He is wholly unable to believe that a change will occur and that he will be at peace. This hour is full of despair and fear; hope in God and the consolation of faith are utterly effaced from his soul, and she is filled through and through with doubt and fear.

Those who are tried in the billows of this hour know from experience the change that follows upon its completion. God does not leave the soul in these things an entire day, for otherwise she would perish, being estranged from the Christian hope; but He speedily provides her with an 'escape.' But even if the oppression of this darkness should be prolonged, you should expect that a change to the better[1] will proceed swiftly from the midst of it.

1 Cor. 10:13

I admonish and counsel you, O man, if you have not the strength to master yourself and to fall upon your face in prayer, then wrap your head in your cloak and sleep until this hour of darkness pass from you, but do not leave your dwelling. This trial befalls those especially who desire to pass their life in the noetic discipline, and who throughout their journey seek the consolation of faith. For this reason their greatest pain and travail is the dark hour when their mind

1. Lit. *to life*. In Syriac this word is also used for *salvation*.

wavers with doubt. And blasphemy follows hard upon this. Sometimes a man is seized by doubts in the resurrection, and by other things whereof we have no need to speak. Many times we have experienced all these things, and we have written of this struggle for the comfort of many.

Those who pass their life in bodily works alone are entirely free of these trials. They are assailed by another kind of despondency, one that is familiar to everyone, and which differs in its mode of action from the trials mentioned and others of similar kind. The healing of these wells up from stillness itself. This is the man's consolation. But he will never receive the light of consolation from intercourse with men, and their converse will never heal him, but only briefly give him rest; thereafter these trials will rise up against him with greater force. Of necessity he must have a man who is enlightened and has experience in these matters, so that by him he can be enlightened and strengthened at the time of his need, but not all the time.

Blessed is he who patiently endures these things within the door [*of his cell*]! Afterwards, as the Fathers say, he will attain to a magnificent and powerful mansion. This struggle, however, does not cease immediately, nor in an hour; nor does grace come once and for all and dwell in the soul, but little by little of one and the other: sometimes trial, sometimes consolation. A man continues in these things until his departure. In this life we should not expect to receive perfect freedom from this struggle, nor to receive perfect consolation. For thus is God pleased to govern our life here, and that those who journey in the way should be amid these things. To Him be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 51

On the harm of foolish zeal that has the guise of the fear of God, and on the help that comes of clemency; and on other subjects

A ZEALOUS[1] MAN never achieves peace of mind; but he who is a stranger to peace is a stranger to joy. If, as it is said, peace of mind is perfect health, and zeal is opposed to peace, then the man who has a wrong zeal is sick with a grievous disease. Though you presume, O man, to send forth your zeal against the maladies of other men, you have expelled the health of your own soul; be assiduous, rather, in laboring for your own soul's health. If you wish to heal the infirm, know that the sick are in greater need of loving care than of rebuke. Therefore, although you do not help others, you expend labor to bring a grievous disease upon yourself. Zeal is not reckoned among men to be a form of wisdom, but as one of the maladies of the soul, namely narrow-mindedness and deep ignorance.

The beginning of divine wisdom is clemency and gentleness, which arises from greatness of soul and the bearing of the infirmities
Rom. 15:1 of men. For, it is said, 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities
Gal. 6:1 of the weak,' and 'Restore the transgressor in the spirit of meekness.' The Apostle numbers peace and patience among the fruits of the
Gal. 5:22 Spirit.

A heart full of sorrow on account of its feebleness and impotence regarding outward physical deeds takes the place of all physical works. Deeds of the body performed without sorrow of mind are like a body without a soul. He that is sorely grieved in his heart but gives rein to his senses, is like a sick man who suffers physically but opens his mouth to every kind of harmful food. He that is sorely grieved in

1. The Syriac word here rendered *zeal* [*-ous*] in some contexts has the negative connotation of inordinate or wrong zeal – fanaticism; the Greek translators added *wrong* to *zeal* in the next sentence to make this plain. The positive use of *zeal* as the guardian of virtue is employed in Homily 55.

his heart but gives rein to his senses is like a man with an only son, [244]
whom he slays with his own hands, little by little. Sorrow of mind is a precious gift before God; and he who bears this gift as he ought is like a man who bears holiness in his members. A man who unleashes his tongue against other men, whether over good matters or evil, is unworthy of this grace.

Repentance joined with conversations is a shattered vessel. Liberality joined with blows is a knife fixed and concealed in honey. Chastity and conversation with a woman is like a lioness and a lamb in one dwelling. Good works and mercilessness are before God like a man slaughtering a son before his father. The man who corrects his companions while his soul is infirm is like a blind man who shows others the way.

Mercy and justice in one soul is like a man who worships God and the idols in one house. Mercy is opposed to justice. Justice is the equality of the even scale, for it gives to each as he deserves; and when it makes recompense, it does not incline to one side or show respect of persons. Mercy, on the other hand, is a sorrow and pity stirred up by goodness, and it compassionately inclines a man in the direction of all; it does not requite a man who is deserving of evil, and to him who is deserving of good it gives a double portion. If, therefore, it is evident that mercy belongs to the portion of righteousness, then justice belongs to the portion of wickedness. As grass and fire cannot co-exist in one place, so justice and mercy cannot abide in one soul. As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so in comparison God's use of justice cannot counterbalance His mercy.

As a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of all flesh in comparison with the mind of God. And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures. As a man who sows in the sea and expects to reap a harvest, so is he who remembers wrongs and prays. As the flame of fire cannot be checked from rising upward, so the prayers of the merciful are not hindered from ascending to Heaven. The current of a stream runs swiftly in a narrow place, and likewise the force of anger whenever it finds a place in our mind. The man who has acquired humility in his heart is

dead to this world; he who is dead to the world has died to the passions; and for him who has died in his heart to his kinsmen, the devil is dead. He who has found malice, with it has found him who originally found it.[2]

There is a humility that comes from the fear of God, and there is a humility that comes from the fervent love of God. One man is humbled because of his fear of God; another is humbled because of his joy. The man humbled from fear of God is possessed of modesty in his members, a right ordering of his senses, and a heart contrite at all times. But the man humbled because of joy is possessed of great exuberance and an open and irrepressible heart.

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Love knows not shame, and for this reason she does not know to give a form of propriety to her members. Love is naturally unabashed and oblivious of her measure. Blessed is the man who has found thee, the haven of all joy! The assembly of the humble is beloved of God like the assembly of the Seraphim. A chaste body is more precious before God than a pure offering. These two, humility and chastity, prepare in the soul a tabernacle for the Holy Trinity.

Walk with your friends circumspectly. When you do this you will profit both yourself and them, for often the soul casts off the bridle of watchfulness under the pretext of love. Keep yourself from conversations, for they are not always profitable. Honor silence in assemblies, for this will keep you from much harm.

Watch over your belly, but still more over your sight. Unquestionably, conflict at home is easier than conflict abroad. Do not believe, brother, that inner thoughts can be checked unless the body is brought into a good and orderly state.

Fear habits more than enemies. He who nourishes a habit within himself is like a man who feeds a fire, for the degree of the strength of each is determined by the fuel with which it is supplied. Once a habit demands something and its request is not fulfilled, the next time you will find it weaker. But if you fulfill its desire just once, the next time you will find its assault against you to be much stronger.

May the memory of this remain with you with respect to all things, for the help received from watchfulness is better than the help received from works. He who is fond of laughter and of making a show

2. I.e. the devil.

before men should be no friend of yours, for he will lead you into loose habits. Do not allow your countenance to be glad with joy in the company of a man who has relaxed his discipline; but keep yourself from despising him. If he desires to stand up, give him your hand, and till death take concern for him. But if you are still infirm, shun the work of healing. 'Give him,' it says, 'the end of your staff,' and so on.[3]

Speak circumspectly before him who is conceited and diseased with envy. For while you are speaking, he is interpreting your words as he pleases, and gathers fuel from what is good in you to make others stumble, and in his mind he changes your words to suit the substance of his illness. As soon as he begins to speak evil of his brother in your presence, show a gloomy countenance. When you do this, you will be found prudent before God and before him.

If you give something to one in need, let the cheerfulness of your face precede your gift, and comfort his sorrow with kind words. When you do this, by your gift the gladness of his mind surpasses even the needs of his body. On the day when you open your mouth and speak ill of someone, even though your thought urged you to say something that seemed correct and for edification, reckon yourself as dead to God and void of all your works. For what need has a man to demolish his own house and set aright that of his companion? [246]

On the day when you are pained in some way, either in body or in mind, for the sake of any man, be he good or evil, reckon yourself as a martyr on that day, and as one who suffers for Christ's sake and is deemed worthy of confession. For remember that Christ died for sinners, not for the just. See how great a thing it is to grieve for wicked men and to benefit sinners even more than the righteous! The Apostle brings this to mind, as something worthy of wonder. Rom. 5:7–8

If you are able to acquire within yourself righteousness of soul, do not take pains to pursue other righteousness. Let all your works be preceded by bodily chastity and purity of conscience, for without them every act is empty before God. Know that every work you do without reflection and examination is empty even if it be comely, for

3. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 76, #331. 'If thou seest a man who hath fallen into the water, and thou canst help him, stretch out thy staff to him, and draw him out, lest, if thou stretch out thy hand to him, and thou art not able to bring him up, he drag thee down and both of you perish.'

God reckons righteousness in proportion to discernment, and not in proportion to undiscerning effort.

An unwise righteous man is a lamp in the sun.

The prayer of him who remembers wrongs is a seed upon a stone.

An unmerciful ascetic is a barren tree.

A rebuke springing from envy is a poisoned arrow.

The praise of a crafty man is a hidden snare.

A foolish counsellor is a blind watchman.

Sitting with senseless men is the shattering of the heart.

Conversation with wise men is a sweet fountain.

A wise counsellor is a wall of hope.

A foolish and imprudent friend is a treasury of ruin.

It is better to see a house full of mourners than a wise man who clings to a fool.

It is better to dwell with beasts than with the envious.

It is better to inhabit a tomb than to dwell with depraved men.

Sit with vultures rather than with the covetous and insatiate.

Be friends with a murderer rather than with a contentious man.

Converse with a swine rather than with a glutton, for the swine's trough is better than the glutton's mouth.

Sit amid lepers rather than amid the proud.

Be persecuted, but persecute not.

Be crucified, but crucify not.

Be wronged, but wrong not.

Be slandered, but slander not.

Have clemency, not zeal, with respect to evil.

Lay hold of goodness, not justice.

Justice does not belong to the Christian way of life, and there is no
[247] mention of it in Christ's teaching. Rejoice with them that rejoice, and
Rom. 12:15 weep with them that weep; for this is the sign of limpid purity. Suffer with the sick, and mourn with sinners; with those who repent, rejoice.

Be every man's friend, but in your mind remain alone. Be a partaker in the sufferings of all men, but keep your body distant from all. Rebuke no man, revile no man, not even those who live very wickedly.

Spread your cloak over the man who is falling and cover him. And if you cannot take upon yourself his failings and receive his chastise-

ment in his stead, then at least patiently suffer his shame and do not disgrace him.

Do not strive with men for the sake of the belly. And do not hate for the sake of honor. And do not find pleasure in judging.

Know, brother, that the reason that we must remain within the door of our cell is to be ignorant of the wicked deeds of men, and thus, seeing all as holy and good, we shall attain to purity of mind. But if we become castigators, chastisers, judges, investigators, vindicators, and faultfinders, in what respect does our life differ from the life in the towns? And if we do not give up these things, what could be more miserable than such a life in the desert?

If you have no stillness in your heart, at least still your tongue. If you cannot give right ordering to your thoughts, at least give right ordering to your senses. If you cannot be solitary in your mind, at least be solitary in body. If you cannot labor with your body, at least be afflicted in mind. If you cannot keep your vigil standing, keep vigil sitting on your pallet, or lying down. If you cannot fast for two days at a time, at least fast till evening. And if you cannot fast until evening, then at least keep yourself from satiety. If you are not holy in your heart, at least be holy in body. If you do not mourn in your heart, at least cover your face with mourning. If you cannot be merciful, at least speak as though you are a sinner. If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be a troublemaker. If you cannot be assiduous, at least in your thought be like a sluggard.[4] If you are not victorious, at least do not exalt yourself over the vanquished. If you cannot stop the mouth of a man who disparages his companion, at least refrain from joining him in this.

Know that if fire goes forth from you and consumes other men, God will demand from your hands the souls which your fire has burned. And if you yourself do not put forth the fire, but are in agreement with him who does, and are pleased by it, in the judgment you will be reckoned as his accomplice.

If you love gentleness, be peaceful. If you are deemed worthy of peace, you will rejoice at all times. Seek understanding, not gold. Clothe yourself with humility, not fine linen. Gain peace, not a kingdom.

4. I.e. consider yourself lazy.

No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble. And no man is peaceful without rejoicing.

[248] In all the paths upon which men journey in this world, they will find no peace until they draw nigh to hope in God. The heart finds no peace from toil and from stumbling-blocks, until hope enters it, makes it peaceful, and pours joy into it. That worshipful and all-holy mouth spoke of this when it said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor
Matt. 11:28 and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Draw nigh, He says, and hope in Me, and find rest from labor and fear.

Divine hope uplifts the heart, but fear of Gehenna crushes it. The light of the mind gives birth to faith; faith gives birth to the consolation of hope; hope fortifies the heart. Faith is the unveiling of the understanding. When the mind is darkened, faith is hidden, fear holds sway over us, and our hope is cut off. It is not the faith that comes from instruction which frees a man from pride and doubt, but the faith that is beheld and dawns in the understanding; this is called knowledge and the revelation of truth. As long as the mind perceives God as God by His being revealed to the understanding, fear will not approach the heart. When we are permitted to be in darkness and we lose this perception, then fear will assail us until we are humbled and we draw nigh to humility and repentance.

The Son of God endured the Cross, therefore let us sinners boldly rely on repentance. If the form of repentance averted God's wrath
3 Kgs. 20:27–29 from Ahab, surely our sincere repentance will not now be unprofitable to us. If the form of humility turned aside divine wrath from him who was insincere, how much more will it from us who sincerely grieve over our falls? Sorrow of mind suffices to take the place of all bodily labor.

Saint Gregory says, 'He is a temple of grace who is united with God, and is constant in his concern over His judgment.' What is concern over God's judgment? It is a continual seeking after His rest; mourning at all times and a contrite meditation on account of those things that always remain imperfect because of the wretchedness of our nature; constant sadness on their account, which the mind retains through powerful thoughts and offers up before God in prayer as an

offering with humble compunction; and, inasmuch as is possible and is within a man's power, to hold solicitude for the body in disdain. Such is the man who carries in his soul the continuous memory of God. As Saint Basil says, 'Undistracted prayer is that which produces in the soul a distinct reflection on God. And God's indwelling is this: to have God established in us by [*unceasing*] memory [*of Him*].'[5] In this manner we become temples of God. This is concern with a contrite heart in preparation for the Lord's rest.

*On involuntary evil thoughts that originate from the previous laxity of negligence**

[249]

Some men sustain their body and, for the sake of God's work, wish to give it a little rest until they strengthen it, and then they turn again to their labor. Therefore, in those few days of our rest, let us not completely relax our vigilance and deliver our entire soul up to slackness, like men who have no desire to return to their work. Those who are pierced by the enemy's arrows in the time of peace have laid away in their soul the cause of this through their will's unrestraint. And they see that in the holy place (that is, in prayer) they wear a filthy garment, namely that which stirs in their soul at the hour of prayer and thought of God. The things that, in the time of pure prayer, seek to do war with us and put us to shame, we ourselves have admitted to our intimacy when our senses were negligent.

Zach. 3:1–4

Watchfulness helps a man more than works, and laxity harms him more than rest. Though internal battles originate from rest, and they molest a man, he still has the power to overcome them. For when a man quits his rest and returns to the place of his work, these attacks fall away and withdraw from him. But it is not so with that which is born of laxity, although slackness is indeed born of rest. As long as a man remains in the realm of his freedom during rest, he can turn back and, by establishing his rule, regain dominion over himself, for he still remains in the realm of his freedom. But through laxity he departs from the realm of his freedom. For if the man had not completely put away his watchfulness, he would not be forcibly and involuntarily constrained to submit to what brings him no rest. If he had not

5. Letter 2. *To Gregory*. *PG* 32.229B.

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

totally abandoned the limits of his freedom, he would not fall prey to encounters that of necessity bind him fast and that he has no power to resist.

Do not relinquish the freedom of any of your senses, O man, lest perhaps you be unable to regain it. Rest only harms young men, whereas slackness injures the old and the perfect also. Those who from rest enter into evil thoughts can return to watchfulness and re-establish themselves in their lofty discipline. But those who, putting their hope in works, have been negligent in watchfulness, are made captive and led from their lofty discipline to a dissolute life: one man is wounded in the land of his enemies and dies in the time of peace; another goes forth under the pretext of purchasing life and receives a thorn in his soul.

We should not be exceedingly grieved when we make a slip in some matter, but when we persist in it; for even the perfect often slip,
[250] but to persist therein is total death. The grief we have over our slight falls is reckoned by grace in the stead of undefiled labor. But the man who slips a second time, hoping that one day he will repent, walks craftily before God; death falls upon him unexpectedly, and he does not reach the time when he hoped to accomplish the works of virtue. Every man who gives free rein to his senses gives free rein to his heart.

The work of the heart binds the external members. And it is evident whether a man does the work of the heart with discernment, following the example of the Fathers who have gone before us, if in the presence of external things he is not tied by material profit, despises gluttony, and is entirely free of anger. But if these three are found in a man, namely, the desire for material gain (whether to a greater or lesser degree), quick temper, and submission to gluttony, then, even though he seem to be a peer of the saints of old, know that his laxity in externals is produced by his lack of patience in inward matters; these things, however, are not produced by a discriminating disdain of one's soul. If this were not so, how could he have despised bodily things and still not have acquired meekness? Discriminating disdain is accompanied by non-attachment, scorn of ease, and the love of mankind. If a man readily and joyfully accepts a loss for the sake of God, he is inwardly pure. And if he does not look down upon any

man because of his defects, in very truth he is free. If a man is not pleased with someone who honors him, nor displeased with someone who dishonors him, he is dead to the world and to this life. The watchfulness of discernment is superior to every kind of discipline accomplished by men of any degree.

Do not hate the sinner; for we are all laden with guilt. If for the sake of God you are moved to oppose him, weep over him. Why do you hate him? Hate his sins and pray for him, that you may imitate Christ Who was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them. Do you not see how He wept over Jerusalem? We are mocked by the devil in many instances, so why should we hate the man who is mocked by him who mocks us also? Why, O man, do you hate the sinner? Could it be because he is not so righteous as you? But where is your righteousness when you have no love? Why do you not shed tears over him? But you persecute him. In ignorance some, who are considered to be discerning men, are moved to anger against the deeds of sinners.

Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are. Although your debt to Him is so very great, He is not seen exacting payment from you; and from the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David [251]
calls Him just and upright, His Son revealed to us that He is good and Ps. 24:8; 144:18
kind. 'He is good,' He says, 'to the evil and to the impious.' Luke 6:35

How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? 'Friend, I do thee no wrong: I choose to give unto this last even as unto thee. Or is thine eye evil because I am good?' How can a man call God just when he Matt. 20:13–15
comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? None other but His very Son said these things concerning Luke 15:11–32
Him, lest we doubt it, and thus bore witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's justice? – for while we are sinners Christ died for us! But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not Rom. 5:8
change.

Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could

become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as mortals do. God does not acquire something that He does not have, or lose what He has, or supplement what He has, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has forever, as the blessed Cyril wrote in his commentary on Genesis.

Fear God because of His love, and not because of the reputation of austerity that has been attributed to Him. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not only for what He will give you in the future, but also for what we have received. And indeed, for this world alone which He has created for us, who can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being? Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no [*faculty of*] memory, as though we never existed?[6] Who will awake this our body for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? O the wondrous mercy of God!

O the astonishment at the goodness of our God and Creator! O power for which all is possible! O immeasurable kindness toward our nature, that He will even bring sinners back into existence! Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, He renews dust unendowed with reason, making it intelligent and rational, and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature capable of thought, even though at his resurrection the sinner will be unable to be reconciled with His grace. Where is Gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is the torment that terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is Gehenna as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He
[252] will raise us from Sheol and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and raise up in glory what has fallen into Sheol?

Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He robes them with the glory of perfection. That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not.

6. St. Isaac refers to the state after death, mentioned again a little below.

Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, O Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace have made me fall silent, and there is not a thought left in me, not even for giving thanks unto Thee. What mouths can confess Thy praise, O good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds which Thou hast created for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou hast fashioned to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 52

On the three degrees of knowledge and the difference of their working and their ways of thinking; and on the faith of the soul and the mystic riches concealed in it; and on how much the knowledge of this world in its ways and means is opposed to the simplicity of faith

THE SOUL that journeys by the pathways of discipline upon the road of faith, and has often made great progress therein, if she returns once more to the ways and means of knowledge, will straightway be crippled in her faith, and will be deprived of the noetic power of faith, which with diverse forms of [*divine*] assistance manifests itself in the pure soul that unquestioningly has recourse to it with simplicity in all her concerns.

For the soul that once and for all has surrendered herself to God in faith, and has received through much experience the taste of His help, will not take thought for herself again, but rather, she is stilled in awestruck wonder and silence, and has no power to return to the ways and means of her own knowledge and to be engaged in them. And this is so lest, on the contrary, she should be deprived of God's providence, which secretly shelters her unceasingly, cares for her, and everywhere cleaves to her incessantly. For the soul would be foolish to suppose herself sufficient to provide for herself on the strength of her own knowledge.

Those upon whom the light of faith has dawned are no longer so audacious as to pray for themselves; nor do they entreat God, saying, 'Give this to us,' or 'Take that from us'; nor do they in any wise take care for themselves. For at every moment, with the noetic eyes of faith, they see the fatherly providence which comes of the true Father to shelter them: He Who in His great and immeasurable love surpasses all in paternal affection and Who, more than all, has the power and might to help us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or think, or conceive.

Eph. 3:20

For knowledge is opposed to faith; and faith, in all that pertains to it, is the breaking of the laws of knowledge (we do not, however, speak here of spiritual knowledge). For such is the definition[1] of knowledge – that without investigation and examination it has no authority to do anything, but it must investigate whether that which it considers and desires is possible. But as to faith, what shall we say? If yes and no approach it at the same time, it will not be persuaded to remain in such a position.[2]

It is well known that knowledge cannot even exist without investigation and the employment of its means of operation; and this is the sign of hesitation regarding truth. But faith requires a way of thinking that is single, limpidly pure and simple, far removed from any deviousness or invention of methods. See how faith and knowledge are opposed to one another! The home of faith is a childlike thought and a simple heart. 'In the simplicity of their hearts,' it says, 'they glorified God.' And, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens.' But knowledge conspires against and opposes both these qualities. Matt. 18:3

Knowledge keeps within the boundaries of nature in all its paths; but faith makes its journey above nature. Knowledge does not allow itself to experience anything that is ruinous to nature, and it keeps far away from it; but faith readily submits itself to this and says, 'Upon the asp and basilisk shalt thou tread, and thou shalt trample upon the lion and dragon.' Fear accompanies knowledge; but confidence accompanies faith. The more a man journeys in the pathways of knowledge, the more he is shackled by fear and cannot be found worthy of freedom from it; but he who follows faith straightway becomes a free man and a ruler of himself, and as a son of God he freely wields all things with authority. The man who has found the keys of faith wields all the natures of creation even as God; for by faith comes the authority, after the likeness of God, to create a new creation. 'Thou didst so will,' it says, 'and all things were present before Thee.' And oftentimes, out of things that are not, faith can do all things. Ps. 90:13 Job 23:13

But knowledge can do nothing without matter. Knowledge is not so bold as to attempt anything that has not been given to nature. How so? The liquid nature of water cannot support upon its back the foot- [255]

1. Or *circumscription, boundary.* 2. I.e. faith does not tolerate deliberations.

steps of a body; the man who comes too close to fire burns himself; and whoever should rashly oppose nature in this fashion brings himself into peril.

Knowledge watchfully guards itself from such things and will in no wise be persuaded to overstep their boundaries. But faith transgresses them with authority, saying: 'If thou go through fire, thou
Isa. 43:2 shalt not be burned, and the rivers shall not overflow thee.' Faith has many times worked such things before the eyes of all creation. If knowledge were given the opportunity to attempt such things, it would in no wise be persuaded. For it is by faith that men have entered into flames and bridled the burning power of the fire, walking unharmed through the midst thereof, and they have trodden upon the back of the sea as upon dry land. All these are above nature and opposed to the ways and means of knowledge.

Do you see how faith has shaken the foundations of knowledge and has proven it futile in all its ways and its laws? Do you see how knowledge keeps within the limits of nature? Do you see how faith passes above nature in travelling on the pathway of its journey? The ways and means of knowledge governed the world for a little more or less than five thousand years, and man was in no wise able to raise his head from the earth and perceive the power of his Creator. For this was not until our Faith shone forth and freed us from the gloom of earthly labors and futile slavery that seeks fruitless distraction. And now when we have reached the unfathomable sea and the unfailing treasure, we desire once again to turn aside to miserable little brooks. There is no knowledge that is not needy, however rich it might be; but heaven and earth cannot contain the treasures of faith. The man whose heart is upheld by the confidence of faith will never be in want; and when he has nothing, by faith he possesses all, as it is written: 'All
Matt. 21:22 things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, ye shall receive'; and again,
Phil. 4:5–6 'The Lord is at hand, have care for nothing.'

Knowledge always seeks means to safeguard those who have acquired it. But what says faith? 'Except the Lord build the house and guard the city, in vain doth he labor that buildeth it and he watch that
Ps. 126:1–2 guardeth her.' The man who takes refuge in faith never employs, or is engaged in, ways and means. For knowledge everywhere sings the
Ecclus. 34:15 praises of fear, as the wise man said, 'He that feareth in his heart is

blessed.' But what says faith? 'He was afraid and began to sink'; and again, 'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear, but ye have received the Spirit of sonship' unto the freedom of faith and trust in God; and again, 'Fear them not, nor flee from before their face.'

Matt. 14:30

Rom. 8:15

Fear is always followed by doubt; doubt, by investigation; investigation, by ways and means; and ways and means, by knowledge. And in examination and investigation, fear and doubt are always made known – for knowledge does not always succeed everywhere, as we showed in the beginning. Often calamities, grievous adversities, and many occurrences filled with peril befall the soul, wherein knowledge and the devices of wisdom are utterly unable to provide help against these difficulties that defy the whole power and limit of human knowledge. But faith is never vanquished by anything. For what help can human knowledge offer in open conflicts or in war against invisible beings, against incorporeal powers, and many other things of this kind?

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Do you see the feebleness of the power of knowledge, and the strength of the power of faith? Knowledge prevents its disciples from approaching anything alien to nature. But see here the power of faith and what it commands its pupils: 'In My Name,' it says, 'ye shall cast out demons, take up serpents, and if ye drink poison, it shall not hurt you.'

Mark 16:17–18

Knowledge enjoins all those who journey in its path to investigate, according to its laws, the end of anything before making a beginning, and thus to commence; lest the end of the thing prove unachievable by the limit of human ability, and labor be spent in vain, and lest the thing prove difficult and impossible to realize. But what says faith? 'All things are possible to him that believeth,' for to God nothing is impossible. O unspeakable wealth, O ocean rich in its billows and its marvellous treasures and mighty floods of the power of faith! How filled with boldness, how replete with sweetness and hope is the journey accompanied by faith! How light are faith's burdens, how sweet its labors!

Mark 9:23

Mark 10:27

Question Whom does he resemble that has been deemed worthy to taste the sweetness of faith but afterwards turns again to unspiritual knowledge?

Answer He resembles the man who has found a pearl of great price and exchanges it for a copper obol, who has abandoned self-sufficient freedom and turned to the ways of destitution, filled with fear and slavery.

It is not that knowledge is blameworthy, but that faith is higher; and if we find fault, it is not knowledge that we blame. Far be it! Rather it is to distinguish the erring modes by which it goes against nature, and how it becomes kindred to the orders of the demons – which distinctions we shall clearly make hereafter; and how many steps there are in which knowledge journeys; what is the difference in each of them; by what conceptions it is awakened in each mode when it abides therein; in which of these modes (when it walks therein) it opposes faith and goes forth outside of nature; what are the distinctions in knowledge; in which degree (when knowledge returns to its
[257] primary aim) it comes into its nature and by its good discipline becomes a stepping-stone for faith; and how far the distinction of its degree reaches; how it passes from these modes to higher ones; what are the modes of that other degree that is first in honor; when it is that knowledge unites with faith and becomes one with it and from it receives the vesture of fiery intellections; when it is inflamed by the Spirit, acquiring the wings of dispassion; and when it is exalted above servitude to things earthly into the realm of its Creator, with the aid of other modes. But for the moment it is suitable that we should know only that faith and its working is higher than knowledge.

Knowledge is perfected by faith and acquires the power to ascend on high, to perceive that which is higher than every perception, and to see the radiance of Him that is incomprehensible to the mind and to the knowledge of created things. Knowledge is a step whereby a man can climb up to the lofty height of faith; and when a man has reached faith, he no longer has need of knowledge. 'Now,' it is said, 'we know in part and we noetically perceive in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done
1 Cor. 13:9–10 away.' Faith, therefore, now shows us, as it were before our eyes, the reality of that future perfection. It is by our faith that we learn those things that cannot be comprehended, not by the investigation and power of knowledge.

These are the works of righteousness: fasting, alms, vigil, holi-

ness, and the rest of such works performed with the body. Love for one's neighbor, humility of heart, forgiving those who have sinned, recollection of good things, investigation of the mysteries concealed in the holy Scriptures, the mind's occupation with good works, the bridling of the soul's passions, and the rest of such virtues, are performed in the soul. All these require knowledge, for knowledge guards them and teaches their order. All these are known as virtues, but they are still only steps by which the soul ascends to the more lofty height of faith.

The way of life proper to faith is more exalted than the working of virtue, and it is not labor, but perfect rest, consolation, words in the heart, and it is accomplished by the intellections of the soul. All these wondrous modes of the spiritual discipline – the practice of which in the spiritual life is awareness, delight, fruition of the soul, burning love, joy in God, and the rest – and whatsoever things in this discipline are bestowed upon the soul accounted worthy of the grace of that yonder blessedness, and whatsoever things are subtly indicated in the divine Scriptures, all these things are accomplished through faith by God, Who is bounteous in His gifts.

A Difficulty But if any says, If all these good things, and the aforementioned works of virtue, the abstention from evils, the discernment of the subtle thoughts that sprout up in the soul, the battle with [258] thoughts, the struggle against the inciting passions, and the rest of such things without which even faith itself cannot manifest its power in the soul's actions – if it is knowledge that accomplishes all these good things, then how can knowledge be considered to be opposed to faith?

Solution We say that there are also three intelligible degrees in which knowledge ascends and descends, and according to the variation of the modes wherein it walks, it submits to change and becomes the cause of either harm or help. There are three degrees: body, soul, and spirit. And although knowledge is single in its nature, yet it becomes more gross or more subtle and changes its provisions and the activities of its conceptions in relation to the noetic and sensible realms. So hearken and learn the order of its activity and causes whereby it either harms or helps. Knowledge is a gift bestowed by God on the nature of rational beings at their very creation. It is natu-

rally simple and undivided, even as the light of the sun; but according to its activity, knowledge undergoes changes and divisions.

On the first degree of knowledge *

When knowledge cleaves to the love of the body, it gathers up the following provisions: wealth; vainglory; honor; adornment; rest of the body; special means to guard the body's nature from adversities; assiduity in rational wisdom, such as is suitable for the governance of the world and which gushes forth the novelties of inventions, the arts, sciences, doctrines; and all other things which crown the body in this visible world. Among the properties of this knowledge belong those that are opposed to faith, which we have stated and enumerated above. This is called common knowledge, for it is naked of all concern for God. And because it is dominated by the body, it introduces into the mind an irrational impotence, and its concern is totally for this world.

This measure of knowledge does not reckon that there is any noetic power and hidden steersman over a man whatsoever, nor any divine care that shelters and takes concern for him. It takes no account of God's providential governance; but on the contrary, it attributes to a man's diligence and his methods every good thing in him, his rescue from what harms him, and his natural ability to avert the plights and many adversities that secretly and manifestly accompany our nature.

This degree of knowledge presumes that all things are by its own
[259] providence, like those men who assert that there is no divine governance of visible things. Nevertheless, it cannot be without continual cares and fear for the body. Therefore it is a prey to faintheartedness, sorrow, despair, fear of the demons, trepidation before men, the rumor of thieves and the report of murders, anxiety over diseases, concern over want and the lack of necessities, fear of death, fear of sufferings, of wild beasts, and of other similar things that make this knowledge like a sea made turbulent by great waves at every hour of the night and day. For knowledge does not know how to cast its care upon God through the confident trust of faith in Him; wherefore in all things that concern it, it is constantly engaged in devising devices and clever contrivances. But when in some instance the modes of its

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

contrivances prove fruitless, it strives with men as though they hindered and opposed it, since it does not see in this the mystical hand of providence.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree that uproots love, is planted in this very knowledge. It investigates the minute faults of other men and the causes thereof, and their weaknesses; and it arms a man for stubbornly upholding his opinion, for disputation, and aids him in cunningly employing devices and crafty machinations and other means which dishonor a man. In this knowledge are produced and are found presumption and pride, for it attributes every good thing to itself, and does not refer it to God.

Faith, however, attributes its works to grace. For this reason it cannot be lifted up with pride, as it is written: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me'; and again, 'Not I, but the grace of God which was with me'; and also, 'Knowledge puffeth up,' which the blessed Apostle said of this same knowledge, since it is not mingled with faith and hope in God, but he said it not concerning true knowledge, far be it!

Phil. 4:13
1 Cor. 15:10
Ibid. 8:1

By humility, true knowledge makes perfect the soul of those who have acquired it, like Moses, David, Esaias, Peter, Paul, and the rest of the saints who have been accounted worthy of this perfect knowledge to the degree possible for human nature. And by diverse *theorias* and divine revelations, by the lofty vision of spiritual things and by ineffable mysteries and the like, their knowledge is swallowed up at all times, and in their own eyes they reckon their soul to be dust and ashes.

But that other knowledge is puffed up, even as is meet, since it walks in darkness and values that which belongs to it by comparison with things of earth, and it knows not that there is something better than itself. And so all [*who cling to such knowledge*] are seized by the uplifting of pride, because they measure their discipline according to the standard of the earth and the flesh, they rely upon their works, and their minds do not enter into incomprehensible matters.

But as many as reflect upon the waves of the glorious splendor of the Godhead, and whose labor is on high, their minds do not turn [260] aside with inventions and vain thoughts. For those who walk in the light cannot go astray, and for this reason all those who have strayed

from the light of the knowledge of the Son of God, and have turned away from the truth, journey in these pathways just mentioned.

This is the first degree of knowledge; in it a man follows the desire of the flesh. We find this knowledge blameworthy and declare it to be opposed not only to faith, but to every working of virtue.

*On the second degree of knowledge**

But when knowledge renounces the first degree and turns toward deep reflections and the love of the soul, then it practises the aforementioned good deeds with the help of the soul's understanding, in co-operation with the senses of the body, and in the light of the soul's nature. These deeds are: fasting, prayer, mercy, reading of the divine Scripture, the modes of virtue, battle with the passions, and the rest. For all these good things, all the various excellences seen in the soul and the wondrous means that are employed for serving in Christ's court in this second degree of knowledge, are made perfect by the Holy Spirit through the action of its power. This knowledge makes straight the pathways in the heart which lead to faith, wherewith we gather supplies for our journey to the true age.

But even so, this knowledge is still corporeal and composite; and although it is the road that leads us and speeds us on our way toward faith, yet there remains a degree of knowledge still higher than it. If it goes forward, it will find itself raised up by faith with the help of Christ, that is, when it has laid the foundation of its action on seclusion from men, reading the Scriptures, prayer, and the other good works by which the second degree of knowledge is made perfect. It is by this knowledge that all that is excellent is performed; indeed, it is called the knowledge of actions, because by concrete actions, through the senses of the body, it accomplishes its work on the external level.

*On the third degree of knowledge, which is the degree of perfection**

Hear now how knowledge becomes more refined, acquires that which is of the Spirit, and comes to resemble the life of the unseen
[261] hosts which perform their liturgy not by the palpable activity of

* Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text.

works, but through the activity accomplished in the meditation of the understanding. When knowledge is raised above earthly things and the cares of earthly activities, and its thoughts begin to gain experience in inward matters which are hidden from the eyes; and when in part it scorns the recollections of things (whence the perverseness of the passions arises), and when it stretches itself upward and follows faith in its solicitude for the future age, in its desire for what has been promised us, and in searching deeply into hidden mysteries: then faith itself swallows up knowledge, converts it, and begets it anew, so that it becomes wholly and completely spirit.

Then it can soar on wings in the regions of the bodiless and touch the depths of the unfathomable sea, musing upon the wondrous and divine workings of God's governance of noetic and corporeal creatures. It searches out spiritual mysteries that are perceived by the simple and subtle understanding. Then the inner senses awaken for spiritual doing, according to the order that will be in the immortal and incorruptible life. For even from now it has received, as it were in a mystery, the noetic resurrection as a true witness of the universal renewal of all things.

These are the three degrees of knowledge wherein is brought together a man's whole course in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit. From the time when a man begins to distinguish between good and evil until he takes leave of this world, his soul's knowledge journeys in these stages. The fullness of all wrong and impiety, and the fullness of righteousness, and the probing of the depths of all the mysteries of the Spirit are wrought by one knowledge in the aforementioned three stages; and in it is contained the mind's every movement, whether the mind ascends or descends in good or in evil, or in things midway between the two.

The Fathers call these stages natural, supranatural, and contranatural. These are the three directions in which the memory of a rational soul travels up or down, as has been said: when the soul works righteousness in [*the confines of*] nature, or when through her recollection she is caught away to a state higher than nature in the divine vision of God, or when she goes out of her nature to herd swine, as did that young man who squandered the wealth of his discretion and labored for a troop of demons. Luke 15:11–32

A recapitulation of the three degrees of knowledge

The first degree of knowledge renders the soul cold to works that go in pursuit of God. The second makes her fervent in the swift
[262] course on the level of faith. But the third is rest from labor, which is the type of the age to come, for the soul takes delight solely in the mind's meditation upon the mysteries of the good things to come. But since a man's nature is not yet completely elevated above the state of mortality and the heaviness of the flesh, and is not yet perfected in the spiritual state that transcends this other state that is liable to aberration, it is unable to attain to the perfection that knows no cessation in its liturgy; and while a man is in this world of deadness, he cannot entirely take leave of the flesh's nature.

So long as a man still abides in the nature of the flesh, he is in continual transition from one [*state*] to the other. At one time, as a poor man and a pauper, his soul performs her service in the second, middle degree, working virtue that is inherent in her nature by means natural to the body. At another time, like those who have received the Spirit of adoption in the mystery of freedom, the soul enjoys the gift of the Spirit, given according to the beneficence of its Bestower; but afterward she again returns to the lowliness of her works, that is, those wrought by the body. The soul keeps watch over the body, lest the crafty one take her captive through the enticements found in this age, and by troubled and erring thoughts. So long as the soul is closed behind the veil of the door of the flesh, she has no confidence, for there is no perfect freedom in this imperfect age.

Every working of knowledge is for the sake of activity and training; the working of faith, however, is not performed in deeds, but is accomplished by spiritual insights through the naked activity of the soul, and it transcends the senses. For faith is more subtle than knowledge, just as knowledge is more subtle than palpable deeds. All the saints who have been found worthy to attain to this spiritual discipline (which is awestruck wonder at God), pass their lives by the power of faith in the delight of that discipline which is above nature.

By faith, we mean not that wherewith a man believes in the distinctions of the Divine and worshipful Hypostases, in the singular and unique nature of the very Godhead, and in the wondrous dispen-

sation to mankind through the assumption of our nature, although this faith is also very lofty. But we call faith that light which dawns in the soul by grace, and which by the testimony of the mind establishes the heart in freedom from doubt through the full assurance of hope that is remote from all conceit. This faith manifests itself not by the tradition of the hearing of the ear, but with spiritual eyes it beholds Rom. 10:17
the mysteries concealed in the soul, and the secret and divine riches that are hidden away from the eyes of the sons of the flesh, but are unveiled by the Spirit to those who are brought up at Christ's table in the study of His laws. Thus He said, 'If ye keep My commandments, [263]
I will send you the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive, and He shall teach you all truth.' John 14:15, 16, 17; 16:13

The Comforter shows a man the holy power that dwells within him at every moment, and the protection, the noetic force that shelters him always and drives away from him all harm, that it should not touch his soul or his body. The luminous and noetic mind invisibly perceives this [*holy power*] with the eyes of faith, and the saints gain greater knowledge of it through experience.

This power is the Comforter Himself Who, in the strength of faith, consumes the parts of the soul as with fire. The soul then rushes forward, despising every danger because of her trust in God, and on the wings of faith she soars aloft, taking leave of visible creation, and as though drunken, she is ever found in the awestruck wonder of solicitude for God; and with simple, uncompounded vision, and with invisible perception of the Divine nature, the understanding becomes accustomed to attending to reflection upon that nature's hiddenness. For until the coming of that which is the perfection[3] of the mysteries, and until we be found worthy of their manifest revelation, faith administers unspeakable mysteries between God and the saints. Of 1 Cor. 13:10
these may we be deemed worthy through the grace of Christ, here as an earnest, but there in the substance of truth in the Kingdom of the Heavens together with those who love Him. Amen.

3. Or *consummation.*

Homily 53

Short sections on other differences in the concepts of knowledge

When knowledge is occupied with visible things, and receives instruction concerning them through the senses, it is called natural; but when it is occupied with the noetic power that is within them and with incorporeal natures, it is called spiritual, since perception in this case is received by the spirit and not by the senses. In both these kinds of knowledge, matter comes to the soul from without to give her understanding of these things.

But when knowledge is occupied with Divinity, it is said to be beyond nature, and even unknowable, since it is beyond knowledge. The soul does not gain divine vision into this knowledge through material external to herself, as in the former instances, but immaterially it manifests itself within her as a gift, suddenly and unexpectedly, and it is revealed from within. 'The Kingdom of the Heavens is within you,' and you should not hope to find it in a place, nor does it come with observation, according to the word of Christ. But it is revealed within the hidden image of the mind without external cause and without meditation upon it, for the mind does not even have matter for meditation upon it.

Luke 17:20–21

The first knowledge comes from constant study and diligence in learning; the second, from a good manner of life and the faith of the mind; but the third is allotted to faith alone: for by faith knowledge is abolished, works come to an end, and the employment of the senses becomes superfluous. The more knowledge descends from this limit, the more it is given honor;[1] and the further it descends, so much the more is it honored. When it reaches earth and earthly affairs, it becomes the lord of all, and without it everything is crippled and in-

1. I.e. by men.

operative. But when the soul raises up her vision and stretches forth her thoughts to celestial things, and longs for that which the eyes of the body see not, and over which the flesh has no dominion, then all things stand by faith, which may our Lord Jesus Christ grant us, He that is blessed unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 54

On the subject of prayer and the other things which are necessarily required for constant recollection and are profitable in many ways, if a man read them with discretion and observe them

ONE OF THE MOST EXCELLENT ALLOTMENTS of the gift of faith is for a man to be certain of the petition of his prayer through his trust in God. Certainty of faith in God is not the soundness of a man's confession (although this is the mother of faith), but a soul that beholds the truth of God by the power of her disciplines. When you find faith united to disciplines in the Holy Scriptures, do not suppose the sense of it to refer to right confession. The faith that gives the confidence of trust is never attained by the unbaptized or those whose mind is perverted from the truth. The certainty of faith reveals itself in the soul in proportion to the lofty mode of life of those who pay heed to the practice of the Lord's commandments.

Continual reflection on the Scriptures is light for the soul, because they imprint on the mind recollections helpful for guarding against the passions and for continuance with God through love and the purity of prayer; further, it makes straight before us the path of peace trodden by the footsteps of the saints. Do not, however, set your hopes upon the notations[1] of the verses when in your prayers or hourly reading they are not attended by great alertness and constant contrition.[2]

1. Gk. *σημειώσεις*. Syriac had a complex system of points to indicate to the reader the tone of voice and emphasis he should employ. Jacob of Edessa writes: 'Syrian writers... devised a system and arranged point-symbols for the accents, so that these various tones, each of which indicated a particular meaning, could be pronounced by the reader through sight as they are recognized by the speaker through hearing.... Each of these point-symbols stands in special relationship to a spoken tone of voice which indicates an intended meaning, and the tone of voice is recognized by the symbol.' *Ktaba d-Semhe*, 4:5.

2. The majority of Greek MSS and the Syriac have this reading. The Greek printed text, however, and the Vatican Gk. MS 605 have the following variant: *Yet do not doubt in the prayers* [*chanted in*] *verses when they are not attended by great alertness and constant*

Accept without fail words spoken from experience, even if the speaker is unlearned; for the treasuries of the great kings of the earth do not despise the addition of a beggar's obol, and by little brooks great rivers are filled to overflowing and their currents are made mighty.

If it is true that the recollection of virtuous men renews the desire for virtue within us when we ponder over them, then it is evident that the recollection of the licentious, when we dwell upon them, renews shameful desire in our mind. For the memory of each imprints and inscribes in our reflections the distinctive nature of the deeds of those recollected, and shows us, as with a finger, either the shame of their deeds or the loftiness of their manner of life accordingly as they are virtuous or licentious. This strengthens in us thoughts and movements belonging either to the right or to the left. We meditate upon them in the secret place of our mind, and in our mind's meditation the peculiarity of their way of life is depicted, so that we are always obliged to behold them. Therefore not only does meditation upon evil harm the man who is engaged in it,[3] but also the sight and the recollection of those who do evil things. And again, not only does the working of virtue greatly help him who accomplishes it, but he is also helped by the imagination of the mind which is fashioned from the recollection of the persons who perform virtue.

From this it can be understood that those who are near to attaining the stage of purity are deemed worthy always to behold certain of the saints during the vision of the night; and at every moment during the day, the vision of them (which has been engraved upon their souls) produces in these men the occasion of joy through their mind's noetic occupation. For this reason they ardently approach the work of virtue, and a great flame of desire for virtue descends upon them.

contrition during your prayers or hourly reading. The point of this reading, which has been accepted by the Orthodox faithful of many generations, is movingly articulated by the holy Elder Joseph of Optina when he says, 'Let no one be disturbed by coldness and hard-heartedness, but while acknowledging oneself as unworthy of consolation and compunction, one must force oneself to pray. If prayer is cold, it does not mean that it is unpleasing to God. Sometimes such prayer can take the place of struggle if a person humbles himself and condemns himself in everything before God.' *The Elder Joseph of Optina*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA, 1984, p. 180.

3. I.e. the meditation.

They say that the holy angels take on the likenesses of saints, venerable and good men, and they manifest these likenesses to the soul in the dreams of sleep, when her thoughts wander, to bring her joy and exceeding gladness; and during the day the angels continually stir these likenesses in the contemplation of their thoughts. Thus by their rejoicing over the saints their work is alleviated, and hereby they progress upon their way.

So it is also in prolonged warfare. He who is accustomed to meditate on that which is evil will be deluded by the demons through a likeness of evil. For the demons assume a likeness and manifest to the soul phantasies which frighten her, employing for the most part the
[268] recollections of things seen during the day. Sometimes they quickly enfeeble the soul by a frightful sight of this kind which terrifies her; but sometimes they demonstrate to her the difficulty of the life of stillness and solitude, and the like.

Therefore, brethren, let us begin henceforth always to discern among the recollections of our meditation, which of them we should converse with, and which of them we should quickly cast out when they approach our thought: whether they are recollections that originate from the demons' forethought, who supply food for our passions; or those that originate from lust and anger; or those that are from the holy angels who give us the beckoning of joy, knowledge, and recollections through the thoughts that arouse us by their proximity to us; or those impressions that were formerly perceived by the senses and that stir up in the soul thoughts that correspond to one of the two mentioned. We shall gain experience of these two,[4] their aspect, their converse, and the manner of their activity, by the clear knowledge of discernment, and thus we shall be able to make a specific prayer to follow upon each of them.

Love that has its cause in [*created*] things is like a small lamp fed by olive oil, whereby its light is sustained; or it is like a torrent that surges with rain-water, whose flow ceases when there is no water to maintain it. But love whose cause is God is a deep welling spring; its flow is never checked, for God alone is the Source of love whose waters are unfailing.

Do you wish to take delight in the psalmody of your liturgy and to

4. I.e. of recollections originating from the angels and those from the demons.

understand the oracles of the Spirit which you recite? Then disregard completely the quantity of verses, and set at naught your skill in giving rhythm to the verses, so that you may speak them in the manner of a prayer. Abandon your customary repetition by heart, and understand what I tell you. As to that which is written after the manner of a history, let your mind gaze steadfastly upon the study of these things as though you were reading certain acts of divine providence, even until your soul is roused to sublime understandings through awestruck wonder at the divine economy; and from this your soul will be moved either to glorification or to profitable mourning. If you find anything that is a prayer, take it for yourself; and when your mind is made steadfast in these meditations, then confusion will give place and depart from you.

Peace of thought is not to be found in slavish activity;[5] nor in the freedom of the children [*of God*] is there found the confusion of turmoil. For confusion is wont to take away the taste of insight and understanding, and to despoil them of their sense, just as a leech sucks out the life of the bodies of other creatures together with the blood of [269] their limbs. Verily, confusion should be called (if permissible) the chariot of the devil, because Satan is ever wont to mount upon it as a charioteer, and bearing with him the throng of the passions, he invades the wretched soul and plunges her into the pit of confusion.

Understand this also with discernment: in the verses of your psalmody, do not be like a man who borrows words from another, lest you imagine that you are diligently increasing your work of meditation, while in fact you are left utterly devoid of the compunction and joy to be found in psalmody. Rather, recite the words of psalmody as your very own, that you may utter the words of your supplication with insight and with discriminating compunction, like a man who truly understands his work.

Despondency is begotten of distraction of the mind, and distraction is begotten of lassitude in works and in reading and from vain conversation, or it is born of a full stomach.

The man who does not contradict the thoughts sowed in us by the enemy, but severs any conversation with them by means of his supplication to God, may have this fact as a sign that his mind has found

5. I.e. in the mere recitation of established prayers.

the wisdom and power which is of grace, and that his true knowledge has freed him of many labors. This man, by discovering the short path which he has come upon, has cut off the many distracted windings of the long way. For we do not have the strength to gainsay at all times every thought that opposes us, so that they may be silenced; and it often happens that they inflict a severe wound upon us which remains unhealed for a long time. Do you think to lecture those who are six thousand years old?[6] And this will itself be a weapon in their hands with which they will smite you, greatly surpassing your wisdom and your prudence. Yet even if you conquer them, the filth of such thoughts will pollute your mind and their stench will linger long in your nostrils. By the first method, however, you will be free of all this and of fear; for there is no helper like God.

Tears during prayer are a sign that the soul has been deemed worthy of God's mercy in her repentance, and that her repentance has been accepted, and through her tears the soul has begun to enter into the plain of limpid purity. For unless a man's thoughts have withdrawn from solicitude for transitory things, and have rejected worldly hope, and disdain for the world has been stirred in them – and unless a man has begun to make ready provisions for his departure, and thoughts arise in his soul which stretch out toward the things yonder – his eyes cannot shed tears. Tears are born of pure and undistracted rumination, and of many perpetual, undeviating reflections,
[270] and of the recollection of something subtle and hidden which enters the mind and saddens the heart by its memory. From these things tears are multiplied and abundantly increase.

When you turn to work with your hands, while you practise stillness in your cell, do not use this commandment of the Fathers as a cloak for your avarice. Because of your despondency, do a little work that will not disturb your mind. But if you desire to labor more in order to give alms, know that prayer is superior in its degree to almsgiving. If, however, you wish to do this because of bodily want, then – provided that you are not insatiate – know that what God provides you with will be sufficient for satisfying your need. For God has never left His laborers in want of any fleeting thing. 'Seek ye first,' said the Lord, 'the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all
Matt. 6:33; 6:8 these things shall be added unto you before ye ask Him.'

6. I.e. the age of the demons as reckoned from the creation of the world.

One of the saints said: 'It does not befit the rule of your manner of life to feed the starving and to make your cell a hospice, for this is the laymen's portion and it is meet for them to practise this as something good, but not for anchorites, who are liberated from care for visible things, and keep guard on their minds through prayer.'

*On the solitary life, and that we must not be timorous and afraid, but must make our heart steadfast through trust in God, and have courage with unhesitating faith, since we possess God as our Guardian and Protector**

If at any time you are found worthy of the solitary life[7] (whose burdens are easily borne in the dominion of its liberty), do not let the thought of fear oppress you, as it commonly does, through many kinds of shifting arguments and refutations. But on the contrary, be like a man who believes that there is a Guardian with him and is perfectly assured through his wisdom that he, together with all creation, is under a single Master Who with a single nod moves, and shakes, and stills, and orders all. There is not one slave who can harm any other of his fellow slaves without a warrant from Him Who provides for them all, and controls all; and all things are under His providence. Rise up straightway and take courage! For although liberty is granted to some, it is not granted for every act. For neither demons, nor ravaging beasts, nor men bent on evil can carry out their will to ruin and destroy their fellows unless the bidding of Him Who governs permits it and assigns it a definite compass. For that divine nod from on [271] high does not command or permit liberty to come into full sway; if it did, no flesh would survive.

The Lord does not suffer the power of demons or of men to encroach upon His creation and do with it as they please. For this reason, always say to your soul, 'I have a Guardian watching over me, and there is not a creature that can even appear in my presence, unless a command should come from on high.' And although you should see with your eyes and hear with your ears their threatenings, do not believe that they will venture to act. For if they had a warrant from the bidding of Heaven, there would be no need of speech and words, but upon their willing it, the act itself would immediately ensue.

* This title is found in the Greek printed text as the beginning of a new homily.

7. Or *anchoritism*.

But again, say to yourself, 'If it is the will of my Master that evil beings should hold dominion over what He has fashioned, I am not vexed at this, as one who would wish to hinder the will of his Lord.' And thus even in temptations you will be filled with joy, as one who knows and is fully aware that his Master's signal steers him through all. Stablish your heart, therefore, by the confidence of faith in the Lord, and be not afraid 'for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that
Ps. 90:5 flieth by day,' for the righteous man's faith in God, it is said, tames
Heb. 11:33 wild beasts as though they were sheep.

'I am not a righteous man,' says one, 'that I should rely on the Lord.' Yet, in reality, it was for the working of righteousness that you came out into the desert, which is filled with tribulations, and on this account you became a minister to God's will. Your toil, then, is in vain if, when you endure these sufferings, you do not understand that God wishes your toil only when you offer Him your tribulation as a sacrifice of love. All those who love God display this distinctive mark, that they submit themselves to afflictions for love of Him. For those who with fear of God are pleased to live in Christ Jesus choose
2 Tim. 3:12 affliction and endure persecution. He then gives them authority over His own secret treasures.

One of the saints said: 'There was an anchorite, a respected elder, and once I went out to him when I was in distress because of temptations. But he was ill, lying down; and when I had embraced him, I sat with him and told him, "Pray for me, Father, for I am exceedingly harassed by the many temptations of the demons." But he opened his eyes, and regarding me attentively, he said, "Child, you are very young, and God will not loose temptations upon you." And I said to him, "Yes, I am very young, but I have the temptations of mighty men." And he said again, "Then it is God's will to make you wise." And I said, "How can I become wise? For every day I taste death." And in reply he said, "God loves you; be still. God is about to give you His grace."

'And he said again: "Know, child, that for thirty years I have made war with the demons, and until the time when I completed the course of twenty years, I had not received any help whatever. But thereafter,
[272] when another five had also gone by, I began to find rest. And as time continued slowly on its way, it increased. The seventh year slipped

by, and after that, when I was in the eighth, it was intensified to a much greater degree. And now that the thirtieth year is running past, and has already reached its end, rest has prevailed to such an extent that I do not even know to what measure it has advanced." And he added, "When I wish to get up for my office, I am permitted to say a single *Glory be;*[8] but as for the rest, if I stand three days, I am in awe-struck wonder with God, and feel no weariness at all."' Behold, the labor of many years, and what limitless rest it bore!

There was one of the fathers who used to eat twice a week, and he told us, 'On a day when I talk with anyone, it is impossible for me to keep my rule of fasting as usual, and I am forced to break it.' And we perceived that guarding the tongue not only wakes up the mind to God, but even in visible labors done by the body it secretly provides great strength with which to carry them out; and it also continuously gives light to the understanding in our hidden work, as the Fathers have said, 'Guarding the mouth wakes up the conscience to God, if it is with knowledge that a man keeps silence.'

This saint made a frequent habit of night vigil. For he said, 'On the night in which I stand till dawn, I rest after psalmody; but after I wake from sleep, during the day I am such that I am like a man not in this world, and no earthly thoughts of any kind rise up in my heart, nor have I need of set rules, but am awestruck with wonder all that day.

'Once when it was one of the days on which I eat, and I had gone four days without tasting anything at all, I got up to say the evening office so that afterward I might have something to eat; as I stood in the courtyard of my cell while there was still much sun, after I began, I was aware of only one *Glory be* of my office, and thereafter I remained not knowing where I might be; and thus I continued until the sun rose again the next day before me and warmed my body. And then, when the sun beat down on me more strongly and scorched my face, my mind returned to me, and lo! I saw it was another day, and I thanked God, seeing that His grace is so abundantly poured out on man, and that He should deem those who pursue Him worthy of such majesty.'

To Him alone, therefore, is due glory and magnificence unto the ages of ages. Amen.

8. I.e. a third of a *kathisma*. The Psalter is divided into twenty *kathismata*.

Homily 55

On how the hidden wakefulness in the soul is preserved, and how sleep and coldness steal into the mind and quench the soul's holy fervor and deaden the Godward desire that yearns for things spiritual and heavenly

IT IS NOT POSSIBLE that the opposing power [*of the devil*] should prevent those who desire good from doing it, unless he finds an opportunity for his evil machinations in the lovers of good themselves. But the matter goes beyond this. In the beginning of its movement, every impulse of a desire of good is accompanied by a certain zeal, similar to coals of fire in its fervent heat. Such zeal usually walls this impulse about like a rampart and chases away from it every opposition, obstacle, and barrier that might appear anywhere near it. For this zeal possesses great strength and unspeakable power to shield the soul at every moment from slackness and from fear of the assaults of every tribulation.

This first impulse is the force of the holy desire planted naturally in the nature of the soul, while this zeal is the impulse set astir by the incensive faculty that resides in the soul. This faculty is placed in us by God for our profit so as to safeguard the boundaries of her nature, and to send forth the impulse of her vehemence for the fulfilling of her natural desire, which is virtue. Without this impulse, virtue cannot be accomplished, and it is called zeal. For it is zeal that stimulates, makes zealous, kindles, and strengthens a man at times and seasons to shun the flesh in the afflictions and fearful trials that confront him, to surrender his soul frequently to death and, for the sake of accomplishing that thing which his soul greatly desires, to withstand the forces of the apostate.

Once in his writings a man clothed in Christ called this zeal a watchdog and guardian of the law of God, which is virtue. For virtue is called the fulfilling of the law of God. There are two means of strengthening, arousing, and inflaming the power of zeal for guard-

ing the house [*of the soul*], just as there are two means by which it is weakened, put to sleep, and made indolent.

The first means of its awakening and inflaming is when a man conceives a certain fear, frightening him concerning the virtue that he has gained or will gain, that perhaps it might be stolen away or brought to naught by some occurrence that could accompany the virtue. This is aroused by divine providence (I mean, the fear possessed by all those who truly do the work of virtue) for the awakening and continuation of zeal in the soul, lest it slumber.

When this fear is aroused in a man's nature, zeal, which we have called a dog, burns night and day like a red-hot furnace, and awakens nature. And in the likeness of the Cherubim it is vigilant, regarding all that encompasses it at every moment. And if, as one might say, a bird should fly by and circle round it, it barks with piercing and unspeakable violence.

But when the same fear is on behalf of something pertaining to the body, it becomes satanic. For in such a case a man has faltered in his faith in divine providence and has forgotten how God takes care and provides for those who contend for virtue's sake, sheltering them at every hour, even as the Holy Spirit says by the mouth of the prophet, 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,' and so on; and again, Ps. 33:15
'The Lord is the strength of them that fear Him'; and the same Ps. 24:14
prophet says, as it were in the person of God, to those who fear Him, 'No evils shall come nigh thee, and no scourge shall draw nigh unto thy dwelling.' Ps. 90:10

When, however, fear is on behalf of the soul (because of those things which befall virtue and attend upon it) lest she should be plundered or harmed by anything, this thought is divine, it is a good anxiety, and its affliction and agony are from God's providence.

Now the second means of strengthening and enkindling the dog is when desire for virtue increases in the soul. For the more this desire increases in the soul, the more natural zeal for virtue becomes inflamed. Now the first cause of its cooling is when the desire for virtue wanes and grows less in the soul. The second is when a self-confident and audacious thought enters into the soul and persists there, and the man begins to hope, think, and harbor the opinion that he need fear [275]
no harm from any power. In this way he lays down the weapons of

zeal and becomes like a house unguarded. The dog sleeps and for a long time abandons his watch.

Most noetic houses are plundered because of this thought; and this comes to pass when the limpid illumination of holy knowledge that abides in the soul is dimmed. And how is it dimmed, if not when a subtle thought of pride slithers into the soul and makes its nest therein, or when a man gives himself over to care more for transient things, or from continual encounter with the world whereby he is deceived, or by the belly, the mistress of every evil?

For every time the ascetic enters into converse with the world, his soul straightway loses force, and especially by encountering a woman. The same is true when he meets many men, for they necessarily crush his soul by vainglory. But if it were necessary to put this succinctly, every time the governing mind encounters the world, it resembles a helmsman who, while calmly passing over the sea, suddenly strikes a reef and is shipwrecked. But to our God be glory, dominion, honor, and majesty unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 56

On patience for the sake of the love of God, and in what manner help is obtained through patience

To the degree that a man despises this world in his ardent concern for the fear of God, divine providence draws nigh to him, he secretly perceives its assistance, and is given limpid thoughts to understand it. And even if a man is involuntarily deprived of worldly goods, in proportion to his loss, the mercy of God will accompany him, and God's love for men will support him. Glory be to Him Who deals mercifully with us both in things of the right hand and of the left, and by means of these things grants us an occasion to find life! For with those who of their own volition have grown too feeble to gain their salvation, God advances their souls toward virtue through involuntary afflictions.

For Lazarus the poor man was not deprived of the goods of this world of his own volition, and moreover his body was grievously wounded by sores, but enduring these two bitter sufferings – each one of which was worse than the other – he was finally honored by finding rest in the bosom of Abraham. God is near to the distressed heart of the man who cries out to Him in his affliction. For even though in what pertains to the body a man is sometimes reluctant to endure affliction so as to receive help (for the Lord acts like a physician who in cases of grave disease effects the healing by resorting to surgery), still the Lord shows great mercy to the man's soul, corresponding to the severity of his sufferings in his tribulation. Luke 16:20 ff.

If, therefore, the desire of the love of Christ has not become so powerful within you as to render you dispassionate toward every affliction because of your joy in Him, then know that the world is more alive in you than Christ. When illness, and want, and bodily exhaustion, and fear of bodily harm perturb your mind so as to sway it from the joy of your hope and from your unsullied care to please the Lord,

then know that the flesh and not Christ lives within you. To speak simply, that which you love and which has mastery within you, this it is that lives in you. If you suffer no lack in anything you need, your body is healthy and no adversaries threaten you, and yet you say that you can advance toward Christ in limpid purity, then know that your mind is sick and you are bereft of the taste of God's glory. I pass judgment upon you not because you are such a man, but rather so that you might know how far you are from perfection, even though you may attain in part by your way of life to the measure of the holy Fathers who have gone before us.

Do not say that no man can be found whose mind remains perfectly exalted above his weakness, and that when his body undergoes shipwreck in the sea of temptations and afflictions, his love for Christ can overcome the suffering of his thoughts. I shall refrain from bringing the holy martyrs to mind, lest I be unable to stand up before the profundity of their sufferings; I shall remain silent about how their great patience, which arose from the power of their love for Christ, conquered their extreme bodily affliction and suffering. We shall, then, let these things be, since they are such that their memory alone is grievous for human nature, and men are troubled by the magnitude of the deed and the astounding nature of the spectacle.

But let us at least examine those bereft of God, the so-called philosophers, so that from the example of their patience we may learn about the weakness of our wills. Yet let even this be kept for its own time, for we are prepared to declare it in its proper place, once we have come to know that such weakness is also a sign of sickness. For we do not judge the matter of ourselves, that we might believe how low we lie, and that it is possible for a man to be entirely above this state. The drunkard will never believe that there are many men who do not even drink wine. He that is lascivious will never believe that there are men who entirely refrain from carnal intercourse. A man who is oppressed by a certain lust will never believe that there is someone who is not oppressed by this lust at all, even though he may be disquieted by others. And a man chronically ill will never believe that there can be a body that is not harassed by illnesses. Such, then, are those who are unable completely to overcome these struggles waged in the mind. They will find consolation in saying that there is

no man who is entirely liberated from being defeated by these things. And they do not believe at all that there are men in whom the love of Christ has overpowered the weakness of nature and who totally despise the body and the love thereof, whose mind is not shaken away from its joy in Christ, who have not yielded to being overcome by the violent oppositions from the side of the body, and that divine gifts [278] have triumphed over the impotence of human nature.

I do not mean to say, however, that for such men as these latter the rugged places on the path of God are past, or that there is anyone who lives on this path without undergoing temptation. On the contrary, I say that the man who lives in virtue will find that day by day his afflictions increase, and the more he makes progress, the more he will be found amid adversities. And this, indeed, is the sign of the trueness of a man's course: that he lives a bitter life in this world and that he departs from this body with suffering. For this world is not the world of the righteous, and the righteous cannot dwell in it without sorrows. Yet the will can be strengthened by a divine gift to despise afflictions, and it can preserve the mind unshaken through the joy of the love of Christ.

The fact that there have been men who have attained to this, and that even now it is possible for men to become such, is due to the mighty assistance of Christ's gift. O man, do not judge the deeds of all men by your own state! Do not weigh their discipline in the scales of your own weakness! If you seek, begin with hope, and you will receive aid. Do not be incredulous, lest you be abandoned by Him Who sows these things in you so that you might understand how great the measure of your deficiency is, by comparison with those who have completely triumphed over the world and its turmoil.

If you do not believe the Church, draw nigh to the philosophers and you will see how much power the will possesses, such that it can be lifted above the body and abide unshaken in the decision it has taken. You will see how these men, who did not even know God, displayed to the world great constancy and fortitude in the heroism of their will, and made manifest how great a power our inward nature possesses, so that if it wishes, it can overcome anything. Therefore, when one reads their histories amazement falls upon him at how much power God has laid up in human nature, for if it wills, it can

overcome all. But because we do not exercise our will, we loudly preach the weakness of our nature. And while we conceal our nature's fortitude behind the weakness of our will, we say, 'Who would ever be able to overcome these things?'

Now one of the philosophers set a rule in his mind to keep silence for a period of time.[1] The king of the Romans was amazed on hearing this, and wished to put him to the test. He therefore ordered that the philosopher be brought before him; but when he saw that he remained silent to every question which he asked him, and gave no answer, the king was enraged, and commanded that he be put to death, since he did not reverence the throne and crown of his glory. But this man was not afraid and held fast to his resolution, and quietly prepared himself for death. The king, however, instructed the executioners, saying, 'If he fears the sword and breaks his resolution, slay [279] him; but if he remains constant to his purpose, return him to me alive.' When, therefore, he drew nigh to the appointed place of execution, those to whom he was committed harassed him, constraining him to abandon his resolve and live. But he thought to himself, 'It is better for me to die in the course of one hour and so hold fast to my purpose on account of which I have struggled so long, rather than be vanquished by fear of death, and outrage my wisdom, and incur the reproach of cowardice upon myself owing to the necessity of the moment.' Thus he calmly laid himself out to receive the blow of the sword. Thereupon he was delivered and lived, according to the command. The king, being told this, marvelled together with all his subjects and released the philosopher with honors.

Some of these men utterly trampled upon natural lust; others bore abuse easily; others manfully endured grave illnesses without grieving; others proved their patience in great tribulations and trials, and others performed voluntary labors; and still others endured complete nakedness (wearing nothing except the covering required by chastity), a lonely dwelling-place, and a diet of green shoots. Thus when the king Alexander once went to see one of them,[2] he heard nothing from him except words concerning disdain for the world.

1. Secundus the Philosopher. The 'king of the Romans' was the Emperor Hadrian, reigned A.D. 117–38.

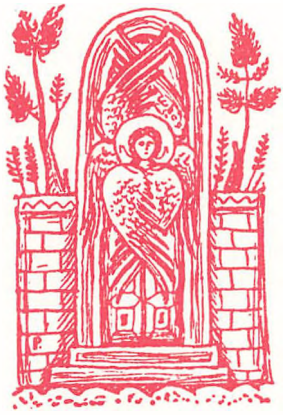
2. Diogenes the Cynic, 412–323 B.C.

Now they did all these things so that they would not be forced to desist from the reflection and converse of their wisdom. If, then, the work of instruction and the discipline of wisdom avail to accomplish such deeds without the aid of the fear of God, the light of faith, and hope for the future world, who will not be despised by his conscience? For notwithstanding all the light of Christ that has been shed upon the world, and the many gifts that have been abundantly poured forth, and the divine hope that is confirmed by deeds from day to day, yet even so, adversities and bodily joys still triumph over a man, and he does not remain hard like a diamond by reason of his love for God, joyfully setting all things at naught. But if someone still doubts how men can overcome these things, he should know that a man can do nothing by his own power, and that it is possible with God's help that when his will is readied, it will find all things subdued to it; this every wise man knows.

By such considerations monks have been filled with zeal, giving up and straightway abandoning the world and its possessions. They withstood and patiently endured every adversity, and by constancy of will and our Lord's assistance (for He dwelt among them) they overcame every difficulty. Many of them became such owing to the example of the philosophers. For they said: 'These profane sages, who were off the path of God, consented to endure such things for the sake of a fleeting wisdom and training in the instruction of this [280] perishing world. They became estranged from the world and remained aloof from it in their affairs, that they might attain to their will's desire. And although they had no righteousness in their reflections, although in their labors there was no hope for something after death, they did all this, having as their aim an empty hope. How much more, then, should we persevere for the love of God's sake, and despise every hardship on account of the great hope for that which has been promised to us!' By this consideration they were strengthened and mastered the laxity of their thoughts. They entered the struggle and did not turn back until they had taken the crown. Thus these men became an example for succeeding generations as well, and they set a pattern for the world, how those who take up this path should enter the struggle.

May we be found worthy of this by the prayers of our most holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and of all those who have pleased Christ by the sweat of their contest. To Him be all glory, honor, and worship together with His co-beginningless Father and the co-eternal and life-originating Spirit of one nature, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.[3]

3. The invocation and doxology are found only in the Greek printed text.



Homily 57

On those who live near to God and pass all their days in the life of knowledge

BLESSED IS HE who lives a vigilant life in this world! A certain elder wrote various words on the walls of his cell. When he was asked what these meant, he replied: 'These are the righteous thoughts that come to me from the angel who stands by me, and also from the upright stirrings of nature. I write them down when they come to me, so that I might reflect upon them in my periods of darkness, and that they might deliver me from delusion.' So ought a man to do all his days.

When another elder was called blessed by his thoughts which said, 'Instead of this fleeting world, you have been deemed worthy of the hope that is imperishable,' he answered and said, 'I am still on the road, and so you praise me in vain; I have not yet come to the end of my path.' Verily this reflection is just. It is proper that the day of death should be set as the banner of our victory. Before death no one can be proclaimed a victor. For his enemies are living, his path lies before him, and he does not know what might stand in his way; his path is not safe and he has not reached the time of security. Therefore neither should that man despair who is enmeshed in evil deeds, since it is possible for him to gain life, for he still lives. There is hope for him even as there is for the man who leads an honorable life.

Why, O man, do you buffet the sinner? The labors of your commerce have not yet entered harbor, and God has not yet cut off hope for him over whom you exalt yourself. Shortly he might surpass you in virtue and become nearer to God than you are. For death has not yet come and sealed either his mode of life or yours. For so long as a man lives there are many changes in his life, but God looks to the consummation and not to what lies in between. There have been many righteous men who have fallen from their righteousness, and many sinners who have climbed up and taken their place. Therefore

let not the righteous man exalt himself, for lo, he still lives; nor let the sinner despair, because God is near to him if he seeks Him, and is prepared to receive him if he makes a change in his way of life and turns toward Him.

If you practise an excellent virtue without perceiving the taste of its aid, do not marvel; for until a man becomes humble, he will not receive the reward of his labor. The recompense is not given for labor but for humility. He who wrongs the latter loses the former. The man who has a foretaste and in truth receives the recompense of good things is superior to him who possesses the work of virtue. Virtue is the mother of mourning, and from mourning humility is born, and upon humility a gift is bestowed. Therefore the recompense is not for virtue, nor for toil on account of virtue, but for humility that is born of both. But if humility is lacking, the former two are in vain.

The working of virtue is the keeping of the Lord's commandments. An abundance of these labors is the good formation of the mind, and this is made steadfast by humility and watchfulness. When the strength of the former[1] fails, this takes their place. Christ demands not the doing of the commandments, but the soul's amendment, because of which He gave His commandments to rational beings. The body works equally in matters of the right hand and those of the left, but the mind is either justified or transgresses according to its volition. There are some men who through God's wisdom attain to life by means of things from the left, and there are some who traffic in sin under the guise of divine pursuits.

The shortcomings of those who watch over themselves are the custodians of their righteousness and are permitted by God so that their transgressions and failings should be a cause of humility. This humility protects the labor of great men, not only by preserving them from pride, but also by humbling them with the recollection of their failings; in this manner they also receive a greater recompense.

A gift free of trials is a disaster to those who receive it. If you do something good before God, and He grants you a gift on account of your uprightness toward Him, so as to spur you on the more and gladden you in your labor, persuade Him to give you knowledge of how it befits you to be humble, or to appoint a guardian over the gift,

1. I.e. virtuous works.

or to take it from you, lest it prove the cause of your ruin. For not every man is able to keep wealth without doing himself harm.

The soul that has concern for virtue and lives in exacting diligence [283] and the fear of God must necessarily suffer sorrow daily, because the virtues are interwoven with sorrows. He who flees afflictions most certainly separates himself from the virtues also. If you desire virtue, surrender yourself up to every kind of suffering, for afflictions give birth to humility. God does not wish that the soul be without care, and the man who wishes to be free of care is estranged from the will of God in his thinking. We speak not of care for material things, but care for things that cause affliction and that accompany good works. Until we have attained true knowledge, which is the revelation of mysteries, we advance toward humility by means of trials. He who rests on his virtue without suffering tribulation has the door of pride open before him.

Who then is the man that desires his thought to be unafflicted by sorrows? The mind cannot abide in humility without buffetings; and without humility neither can it persevere with limpid purity in prayer to God. First a man withdraws his mind from his proper care and thereafter the spirit of pride approaches him. When he tarries in pride, the angel of providence, who is near him and stirs in him care for righteousness, withdraws from him. And when a man wrongs this angel and the angel departs from him, then the alien[2] draws nigh him, and from henceforth he has no care whatever for righteousness.

'Before ruin cometh pride,' says the wise man; and before a gift Prov. 18:12 comes humility. By the quantity of pride visible in a man's soul is determined the weight of the bruising nigh to being sent upon her by God. God does not withdraw far from a man for one sort of sin, nor does He abandon him completely and abhor him, until He finds his mind engrossed in intercourse with pride or blasphemy; and the first of these [*passions*] is the cause of the second. Those who in their thinking depart from the path of humility and are stripped of God's help, either fall into the disgrace of lasciviousness, or into blasphemy against divine things, or into harm to their mind. Those who exalt themselves for their virtuous way of life fall for the most part into disgraceful lasciviousness. But those who exalt themselves for their

2. I.e. the devil.

knowledge and intellectual employment fall into blasphemy against the things of God or into derangement of the mind.

Pride is not when a proud thought passes through the mind, nor when a man is overcome by pride for a time, but when it permanently abides in him. In the first instance there can be compunction; but he who has loved pride knows no compunction. For if he felt compunction, he would not persist in pride. The grievous thing is not so much to commit sin or to speak evil against God, as to continue in such evil. The former indicates a feebleness of nature, but the latter, audacity of the will.

[284] But it is also by the praise of the sons of men that a man becomes deranged in his understanding and is smitten with insanity, as when he desires to perform deeds among men that are beyond his measure, so that the praise of his greatness may increase and men will perceive him to be near to God. Many have excelled in their disciplines, have grown rich in gifts from God, and been honored with the grace of working signs. But afterward these same men, who were formerly so honored, underwent a change and were smitten of God, because they were unable to bear the many gifts they had received and were carried away by pride. Therefore they were rejected by God as dross and became strangers to the lofty rank they had enjoyed. Many have there been who were quiet and stable of mind, whose words were weighed, whose life was chaste, whose knowledge was envied, but who have become an object of terror to those who knew them and a most lamentable sight for those who see them.

Therefore with great lamentation raise your voice to God and beg for humility. Fill your mouth with weeping and sprinkle dust on your head. Do not rise from the earth, nor lift your head from the ground, until God has had pity on you and caused you by death to pass away from this life, or has shown you mercy and given you humility. Do not still your mourning until you perceive in your soul that you have received it, lest perhaps you suddenly be found as one of those men. But although you should receive humility, do not raise up your eyes, or look into heaven, or fill your gaze with the sight of men, or give your heart rest from fear and supplication. In such a way you will, perhaps, be preserved from the evils prepared for us by the demons along the pathway of this our manner of life, a pathway filled with

shadows, narrow, beset with many stumbling-blocks, defying our knowledge by reason of its incomprehensibility to human nature.

Believe me, my brother, and give credence to my words: you are not sufficient to comprehend all the power of the demons, and your knowledge is not sufficient to withstand their artifices. Now, therefore, permit much light to be shed forth within you, even that light[3] wherein the love of Christ is found, and you will be laid up within the rampart of divine mercy, because of the honor of the humility you have attained.

But if you enter into the gloom of temptations because this light[3] recedes, and you are permitted to be tried by that dense darkness of soul which they experience who are abandoned by God and are surrendered into the hands of the demons, then you will know that you are before them like an infant who knows not where to turn. All your knowledge will be in turmoil like that of a little child. And your mind which was firmly established in God, the accuracy of your knowledge, and your sound thinking will be in the midst of a sea of doubts. By one thing alone can you vanquish them:[4] by humility. As soon as you take hold of this, all their power vanishes.

Do not consider it a sign that your soul is healthy when you [285] smoothly wend your way with joy in God, but when the bonds of earthly matters do not distract your mind from the love of God and neighbor, and when your ties with certain persons do not distract you from your care for our Lord, to Whom be glory, and may He keep us near Him and in converse with Him! Amen.

3. I.e. humility.

4. I.e. the demons.

Homily 58

On the many changes that cleave to the mind and are tested by prayer

TO CHOOSE WHAT IS GOOD belongs to the good volition of the man who desires it; but to realize the choice of the good volition belongs to God. For this, a man has need of God's help. Therefore we accompany our good desire with constant prayer, and we pray not only because we need help, but also so that we can distinguish whether it is pleasing to God's will or not.

For not every fair-seeming desire falls into the heart from God, but only that which is profitable. It happens that a man desires good, but God does not help him therein; for a semblance of a good desire may also enter a man from the devil. It seems to the man that this is for his help, but often it is beyond his measure. The devil himself contrives this for the man's detriment and compels him to seek a thing, although he has not yet attained to this mode of life; or because it is alien to his monastic state; or because when he moves the man to accomplish his desire, it is not the right time to do so; or because the man has neither the knowledge nor the bodily strength sufficient for it; or because the present moment does not lend us a hand. The devil strives in every way under the guise of some good thing to trouble the man, or to harm his body, or to set a hidden snare in his mind.

Howbeit, let us make constant prayer fervently, as I said, with respect to the good desire that arises within us, and let each of us say: 'May Thy will be done, until I bring to completion the good work which I have desired to do, if it be pleasing to Thy will. For it is easy for me to will it, but to do it is not within my power, unless I receive grace from Thee; though in truth both are Thine, "both to will and to do." For it is not without Thy grace that I was either persuaded, or afraid, to accept this desire set in motion within me.'

Phil. 2:13

The habitual practice of the man who desires good in the discernment of his mind is this: in prayer to labor for it continually, and

through prayer to receive power that aids him in doing it and wisdom to distinguish what is genuine from what is counterfeit. The good is discerned by much prayer, by toil and watchfulness, incessant yearning, constant tears and humility, and by assistance from Heaven, especially when a man has proud thoughts which oppose it; for these obstruct God's help from us; but we bring them to naught by prayer.

Homily 59

On love of the world

TRUE IS THE WORD OF THE LORD which declares that no man possessing love for the world can acquire the love of
Matt. 10:37 God, nor can any who has communion with the world have communion with God, nor can any who has concern for the world
Matt. 6:24 have concern for God. When we abandon the things of God for the sake of vainglory – or often for the lack of some bodily necessity – many of us turn aside to other things. Such men have avowed themselves to labor for what pertains to the Kingdom of the Heavens, yet they do not remember the Lord's promise which He has spoken, 'If you make your every concern to be for the Kingdom of the Heavens, I will not deprive you of what is needed by visible nature, but all these things shall come to you with the rest. For I will not let you take
Matt. 6:33 thought for them.'

Will He take thought for the birds which lack rational souls and have been created for our sake, and yet be neglectful of us? Not so. The man who is concerned with things spiritual, even with one of them, has his bodily needs provided for without his taking any thought for them, either with regard to the scarcity of what he needs or the time [*needed to supply it*]. A man unduly concerned with the needs of the body involuntarily falls away from God. But if we are diligent in attending to what is done for the Lord's Name, He Himself will take thought for both, according to the measure of our diligence and the gravity of our need of each.

However, we should not seek to make trial of God in our souls, wishing to receive bodily benefits in return for our labors, but should turn all our labors toward the hope of things to come. For the man who, with his soul's fervent love, has once and for all surrendered himself to virtue, and is possessed of a longing to bring its work to perfection, will never again be concerned with the body's needs, whether or not he is in want. With regard to this it must be said that

many times God permits the virtuous to be tempted in such matters as these, and moreover He allows many evils to be roused up against them from every side, and He smites them in their bodies, like Job, and brings them to poverty, causes them to be repudiated by mankind, and strikes them in whatever they possess; their souls alone are not approached by harm.

For it is not possible, when we are faring on the way of righteousness, for us not to encounter gloom, and for the body not to travail in sickness and pains, and to remain unaltered, if indeed our love is to live in virtue. But the man who of his own will lends himself to the slaying or the destruction of his own life or to anything else that is harmful, is under condemnation. Now if, while a man is walking in the path of righteousness, and is making his way toward God, and has many similar companions, he encounters in this path some affliction of this sort, he must not turn aside from his way. Rather, he should accept whatever it is joyously, without scrutiny, and give thanks to God, because God has sent him this gift. That is to say, because he has been deemed worthy to fall into temptation for His sake, and to become a partaker of the sufferings of the prophets and the apostles, and of the rest of the saints who endured tribulations for the sake of God's path, whether from men, from demons, or from the body. For without the bidding of God it is impossible that tribulations should be permitted to arise; but they occur so as to be for a man the cause of righteousness.

It is not possible that God should benefit the man who longs to be with Him otherwise than by bringing temptations upon him for the sake of the truth. Further, without a gift from Christ, a man cannot himself become worthy of this greatness – that is, on account of these divine things to enter into temptations and to rejoice. Saint Paul also testifies to this. For so great is this, that he plainly calls it a gift that a man should be made ready to suffer for hope in God through faith. Thus he says, 'Unto you it is given from God, not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for His sake.' And as Saint Peter wrote in his epistle, 'When ye suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye, seeing that ye are become partakers of the sufferings of Christ.' Therefore, when you are unoppressed, do not rejoice; and when tribulations come upon you, do not be sullen, accounting them as foreign to

Phil. 1:29

1 Pet. 3:14; 4:13

God's way. For His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the cross and by death. But how is it with you, that the
[290] afflictions on the path seem to you to be off the path? Do you not wish to follow the steps of the saints? Or have you plans for devising some way of your own, and of journeying therein without suffering?

The path of God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of ease leads, and how it ends. God never wishes the man who gives himself up to Him with his whole heart to be without concern (that is, concern over the truth). But from this he knows that he is under God's providence – that He perpetually sends him griefs.

Those who persevere in the midst of temptations are never allowed by providence to come into the hands of demons, especially if they kiss the feet of the brethren, and cover their faults and hide them as if they were their own. Whoever wishes to be without any concern in this world and, while desiring this, yearns besides to spend his days in virtue, is repulsed by the way of God. As the Blessed Interpreter[1] said in [*his commentary on*] the Book of Matthew, 'It is impossible for those who desire virtue to escape from griefs.' For inasmuch as the soul is making her way against things that oppose her, it is inevitable that her griefs will be many. For when griefs forsake her, it is because she has first of all forsaken what was proper to her. Whoever says that he is without concern and that he leads a life of virtue, this man does not even know what it is that engenders virtue in the soul. For we are persuaded what the guides to virtues are: the door to Heaven is opened before the soul by the hand of trials. Our Fathers have guided us in this path. For God, Who made His saints glorious through contest – and their mind lost not its strength, because of their hope of that which is to come – will also preserve and help us by their prayers. Amen.

For not only of their own will do the just triumph in good works, but it is also through involuntary temptations that they triumph mightily, by means of the trial of their patience. For they valiantly endure all the bleak things that we have related, looking for an astonishing recompense in the world to come. A soul that holds fast to the fear of God fears nothing that can harm her bodily.

1. I.e. Theodore of Mopsuestia. See Introduction, pp. 79–80.

Homily 60

That without necessity we should not desire or ask to have manifest signs wrought by our hands or unto us

ALTHOUGH THE LORD is always near the saints helping them, He does not manifestly show His power by some work and visible sign without need, lest the help we receive should be made ineffectual and turned to our injury. Thus does the Lord act when He provides for His saints, though indeed His hidden care is not absent from them even for a moment. In all things, however, He leaves them to exhibit a struggle and to labor in prayer in accord with their strength.

But if they encounter something that is so difficult as to overcome the degree of their knowledge, and they grow weak and fall short of it because their nature is not sufficient for the task, then He accomplishes it Himself, according to the greatness of His dominion, and according to what is profitable for them; and as He knows [*best*], they receive help. In so far as possible He strengthens them secretly, until they become strong in the face of their tribulation. For the Lord makes the entanglement of their tribulation to be resolved by the knowledge which He grants them; and by divine vision, He wakens them to glorification that profits them in both ways. If, however, the occasion requires manifest action, He will of necessity do this also. The Lord's ways are most wise and they are employed at a time of want and necessity, and not by chance.

He who without necessity dares to meddle in this,[1] or entreats God with the desire that miracles and mighty signs be wrought by his hands, is tempted in his mind by a jesting demon. He is a boaster and sick in his conscience. For we ought to entreat God for help in the time of affliction; but it is very dangerous to make trial of God without necessity, and the man who desires to do so is truly not one of the righteous. Now that the Lord acts, while not willing to do so of Him-

1. I.e. the workings of divine providence.

self – this is found to be the case for many of the saints;[2] but that a man of his own will should desire this without there being any necessity, this is to fall away from vigilance and to slip from knowledge of the truth. For if his entreaty is heard, the evil one will gain a hold over him as one who has been audacious before God, and will lead him into greater peril. Not only do truly righteous men desire no signs, but they turn away from those which are granted to them; not only do they wish these not to be wrought before the eyes of men, but they do not even wish them to be wrought secretly within themselves.

For behold, because of his limpid purity one of the holy Fathers was given the gift to foreknow those who were coming to him; but the elder prayed to God that the gift might be taken from him, and he entreated other holy men to pray for the same.[3] If some of them received gifts, it was only by the constraint of necessity that they accepted them, or because of their simplicity. But as for the rest, the Divine Spirit moved in them, and in no wise by chance.

Consider what the holy and blessed Ammon said to God when he had set out to receive the blessing of Saint Anthony the Great and lost his way. He did not say, 'O God, take me and set me down where Anthony is,' though he could have done something like this because of his nearness to God, and because of his necessity; for it is said that those who wander in that desert incur danger. Notwithstanding all these things, he did not say this to God, but said only this word: 'O Lord, let not Thy creature perish.' Do you see the humility, do you understand the true wisdom of the Fathers? And God, because He knew that the man was true and not led in his deliberations by pride, showed unto him His care for the saints, and did to the man as his greatness deserved. And so, although Ammon did not beseech, God did what was meet. For Ammon lay down to sleep; and rising he saw as it were the hand of a man hanging above his head in the sky and showing him the way, till it went and stood still above the cave of the blessed Anthony.[4] Do you perceive God's care for His servants? It would have been possible even not to allow him to lose his way, but God desired that Ammon should know how much He cared for him.

2. E.g. the miracle at Cana (John 2:1–11) and the drought ordained by the Prophet Elias (3 Kgs. 17–18). 3. Budge, *PHF*, Vol. II, p. 251, #488. 4. Ibid. p. 106, #449.

So He let him stray and showed him afterward the way clearly, not through a man, but by an angel and in the air.

Remember also Abba Macarius when he went to Scete bearing baskets. For he grew fatigued and weary, and he sat down because he could not walk any longer. But he did not ask of God that He do anything for him by His power to give him comfort. Rather, he entrusted [293] himself to God, saying, 'O God, Thou knowest that I have no more strength!' Then at once, in a moment, he was taken up by divine power and placed there whither he wished to go, both he and his baskets.[5]

Those who are truly righteous always think within themselves that they are unworthy of God. They are proved to be truly righteous by the fact that they consider themselves wretched and unworthy of God's care. They profess this both openly and in secret, taught to do so by the Holy Spirit, lest they should lack the heedfulness that befits them, and so that they might labor so long as they are in this life. God has prepared a time of rest in the age to come. Those who have the Lord dwelling within them do not wish to be at rest or to be freed of tribulations, although at times they are secretly granted consolation in spiritual things.

And this does not belong to the nature of virtue, to wit, that when a man attains to it, he should be free of care and labor; but the dwelling-place of the Spirit consists in ever striving to subdue oneself, even if there exists a way to accomplish the matter with ease. For it is the will of the Spirit for those in whom He dwells, that they should not become accustomed to sloth. Neither does He urge them to seek for ease, but He rather incites them to labor and to give themselves up to greater afflictions. He teaches them vigilance and makes them strong by temptations and brings them near to wisdom, for such is the will of the Spirit, that those beloved of Him should live in hardships.

It is the spirit of the devil, not the Spirit of God, that dwells in those who pass their life in ease. The Spirit of God is not pleased with bodily comforts, nor does He find a life of ease acceptable, but one of hardships. The devil, on the contrary, is pleased with a life that is filled with comforts, according to the testimony of our Lord. The

5. Ibid. p. 166, #48.

Holy Spirit withdraws from ease, as the holy Fathers have said, 'The Spirit of God does not dwell in a body that is relaxed by ease.' Rather, the Spirit looks to find where men constrain themselves by afflicting their bodies and readying their souls, and He makes His abode with them, teaching them how to live during the short time of this life. Those who love God live out their lives amid every sort of affliction. For all the righteous have expelled this world from themselves by means of hardships. And to the extent that they draw nigh to God, their hardships increase.

One of those who love God said, 'I have given oath that I die dai-
1 Cor. 15:31 ly.' By this the sons of God are set apart from the rest of mankind: they live in afflictions, but the world rejoices in luxury and ease. For it is not God's good pleasure that those whom He loves should live in ease while they are in the flesh. He wishes them rather, so long as they are in this life, to abide in affliction, in oppression, in weariness, in
[294] poverty, in nakedness, isolation, want, sickness, degradation, buffetings, contrition of heart, bodily hardship, renunciation of relatives, and sorrowful thought. He wishes them to possess an aspect differing from all creation, a habitation unlike that of the rest of men, and to live in a solitary and quiet dwelling, unknown to the sight of men and bereft of any sign of the gladdening things of this life; mourning is found within [*their dwelling*], and cheerfulness far from it; distresses press frequently upon it; nor do they fully have the body's needs as do the rest of men; their bedding is the ground; their faces are consumed with fasting; their knees are feeble with weakness; the normal functioning of their internal organs has been ruined by use foreign to the customs of men; they weep, but the world laughs; they are somber, but the world is joyous; they fast, but the world lives in pleasure. The whole creation is quiet in a sweet sleep, but they keep vigil in prayer. They toil by day, and by night they compel themselves to ascetic struggles in straitness and weariness. The saints live a bitter life in the world, in a lowly body, in a straitened soul, in hardships on all sides.

Thus it is the will of God that they who draw nigh to Him should live amidst adversities, humbled and brought low with all their soul and their body. Some of them abide in voluntary afflictions, others in toilsome warfare against the passions; some bore with bitter diseases

in their bodies, some with miseries, and with persecutions by men; in peril from passions, in peril from demons, in peril from sicknesses, in peril from poverty. Some were persecuted, some were slain, some were sawn asunder, some were stoned, some were drowned in the sea, some while living had their limbs cut off; some were delivered up to sport and mockery; some entered into a hole of blazing flame, others into chains and mighty scourgings; some fell by the edge of the sword, others went about clothed in sheep-skins and goat-skins, and were as wanderers in the desert. The saints were in afflictions in mountains and caves and in dens of the earth, according to what the Apostle testifies, 'Of whom the world was not worthy.' Heb. 11:36–38

But what is more astonishing than all, is that although they were found in such hardships, they did not expect to be delivered or to be given refreshment, in accord with the saying of the blessed Apostle. Ibid. 11:35 Glory be to Him Who gives them crowns, Who by the suffering of the Cross perfected this path after enduring all such things Himself, so that His saints may also follow in His footsteps!

In these men the word of the Lord is fulfilled that says, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' but in Me ye shall rejoice. By the John 16:33 power of this rejoicing these saints were given fortitude patiently to endure. May God, by Whose power the saints persevered in these struggles and did not grow feeble in their hope, confirm His faith in us all! Amen. In truth, without afflictions there is no life.

God knows that two joys cannot abide in one man simultaneously; and because it is impossible for those who live in bodily ease to hold firmly to His love, He restrains His servants from ease and its enjoyment. May Christ our Saviour, Whose love vanquishes every bodily death, manifest in us the power of His love! Amen.

Homily 61

On the reasons why God permits temptations to come upon those who love Him

FROM THE LOVE that the saints show for God on account of the things they suffer for His Name's sake (when they endure straitness and do not forsake that which God loves), their hearts acquire the boldness to gaze toward Him without a veil and to beseech Him with confidence. Great is the power of bold prayer. For this reason God allows His saints to be tried by every sorrow, then to experience anew and prove His aid, and to understand how great a providence He has for them, for in their perils He is found to be their Redeemer. And again, He does this so that they may gain wisdom from temptations, lest they be unlearned men and be deprived of the two parts of training, and so that they may acquire the knowledge of all things, lest perhaps they be mocked by the demons. For if He exercised them only in that which is good, they would lack training in the other part and would be blind in battles.

If we say that God guides His saints without training and without their knowledge of it, then we are saying that He wishes them to be like oxen and asses and creatures which possess no freedom. If a man is not first tried by the experience of evils, he has no taste for the good. Hence when in evils he meets with that which is good, he will be unable in knowledge and freedom to make use of it as being his very own. How sweet is knowledge that is gained from actual experience and diligent training, and what power it gives to the man who through much experience has found it within himself, the same is known by those who have been assured of and have seen the help it affords them.

Then they learn the weakness of their nature and the help of divine power, when God first withholds His power from them while they are amid temptations. Thus He makes them conscious of their nature's impotence, the arduousness of temptations, and the cunning

of the enemy. Thus He gives them to understand against whom they must wrestle, what kind of nature they are clothed with, how they are protected by divine power, how far they have advanced on the way, to what height God's power has raised them up, and how powerless they are before the face of every passion when the divine power is withdrawn from them. Through all these things they acquire humility, cleave closely to God, look for His help with expectation, and persevere in prayer. Whence could they have received all these boons, if they had not had experience of the many evils which God allowed them to undergo? As the Apostle says, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan.' But by the experience of many interventions of divine assistance in temptations, a man also acquires firm faith. Henceforth he has no fear, and he gains stout-heartedness in temptations from the training he has acquired.

2 Cor. 12:7

Trial is profitable for every man. For if trial was profitable for Paul, 'Let every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.' The diligent are tried, that they might add to their riches; the lax are tried, that they might guard themselves from what is harmful; the sleepy are tried, that they might be armed with wakefulness; those afar off are tried, that they might draw nearer to God; those who are God's own are tried, that with boldness they might enter into His house.

Rom. 3:19

The son who is not trained will receive no profit from the riches of his father's house. For this reason, then, God first tries and afflicts, and thereafter reveals His gift. Glory be to our Master Jesus Christ Who brings us the sweetness of health by stringent medicines!

There is no man who will not feel oppressed at the time of training, nor any who will not find the time bitter wherein he is given the medicine of trials to drink. Without temptations a man cannot acquire a strong constitution, yet to endure with patience is not within our power. For how should the clay vessel endure the vehemence of the waters, if the divine fire had not hardened it? If we submit ourselves to God, while beseeching Him humbly with perseverance in unceasing desire, we shall certainly receive all, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Homily 62

On how a man can know the measure in which he stands by the thoughts that are stirred in him

As long as a man is negligent, he fears the hour of death; when he draws nigh to God, he fears to stand before the judgment; but when he proceeds forward with his whole heart, both fears are swallowed up by love. Why is this so? Because while a man remains in the knowledge and manner of life of the flesh, death terrifies him. When his knowledge becomes natural and he leads a good manner of life, his mind is at all hours occupied with recollection of the judgment to come. For then he stands aright with respect to his nature, he is moved in the level proper to the soul, he is guided by his knowledge and his discipline, and he is well fit to draw nigh to God. But when a man has reached the knowledge of the truth by the active perception of the mysteries of God and becomes steadfast in his hope in things to come, he is swallowed up by love. The carnal man fears [*death*] as a beast fears slaughter; the rational man fears the judgment of God; but the man who has become a son is adorned by love and is not taught by the rod of fear; he says, 'But I and my father's house will serve the Lord.'

Josh. 24:15

He who has attained to the love of God no longer wishes to remain in this life, for love abolishes fear. My beloved, I have become foolish, and I cannot bear to guard the mystery in silence, but I am become a fool for the sake of the profit of my brethren. For true love is not able to tarry in any mystery without her beloved. Often when I was writing these things my fingers failed me in setting down everything on paper, and they were unable to endure the sweetness that descended into my heart and silenced my senses. Blessed is the man who reflects always upon God, who has withheld himself from every worldly thing, and ever remains with Him alone in the converse of the knowledge of Him! If he can forbear, it will not be long before he beholds much fruit.

2 Cor. 12:11

Joy that is in God is stronger than this present life. Whoever has found this will not only not cast a glance at the passions, but will not even give a thought to his own life, nor will he have awareness of anything else, if in truth he has been accounted worthy of this joy. Love is sweeter than life, and understanding according to God, from which love is begotten, is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. What is this sweetness of love that is sweeter than life? It does not seem grievous to love to undergo a bitter death for her beloved's sake. Love is the offspring of knowledge, and knowledge is the offspring of health of soul; health of soul is a strength that comes from prolonged patience.

Question What is knowledge?

Answer The perception of life immortal.

Question And what is life immortal?

Answer Consciousness in God; for love springs from understanding. Knowledge according to God is king of all desires, and every sweetness of the earth is superfluous to the heart that has received it. For there is nothing like the sweetness of the knowledge of God.

A Prayer O Lord, fill my heart with eternal life!

Eternal life is consolation in God; and he who has found consolation in God considers every worldly consolation to be superfluous.

Question Whence does a man perceive that he has received wisdom from the Spirit?

Answer From the knowledge that teaches him the ways of humility in his hidden depths and in his senses, and reveals to him in his understanding how humility is received.

Question Whence does a man perceive that he has attained to humility?

Answer From the fact that he regards it as odious to please the world either by his association with it or by word, and that the glory of this world is an abomination in his eyes.

Question And what are the passions?

Answer They are provocations that are planted in the things of this world and move the body to satisfy its necessary functions; these cease not to assault us so long as the world stands. But these assaults do not enter the heart of a man who has been deemed worthy of divine grace, who has tasted and become conscious of something high-

er; for in their place another and better desire has gained the mastery, so that neither these assaults themselves nor anything born of them
[299] approaches the heart of such a man, but they remain outside, inactive. This is not because the assaults of the passions have ceased to exist, but because the heart which receives them is now dead to them and lives in something else. And again, it is not because a man has relaxed the watchfulness of discernment and works, but because his mind is no longer troubled by anything, for his conscience is satiated with the delight of something else.

A heart that has received an awareness of spiritual things, and the divine vision of the age to come in all exactness, is in its conscience with respect to the memory of the passions like a man who, being satiated with sumptuous food, pays no attention to a dish of lesser quality that is set before him; he has no desire for it, but rather despises and recoils from it. This he does not merely because of the despicable and hateful nature of the latter, but also because of his satiety with the former delectable food which he ate. He is not like that young man who wasted his inheritance and thereafter desired to fill his belly
Luke 15:11–32 with husks, since he had already spent his paternal wealth.

Now when a man loses his wealth, and is reduced to poverty, and is deprived of the sumptuous and excellent food in which he was wont to revel in his palatial home, he eventually forgets his former ways and the taste of those magnificent dishes, his belly is no longer filled with the savor of those fattening foods, and necessity constrains him to turn to very paltry fare. And it is just so with the man who has been vouchsafed health of soul. For if he is deprived of that divine sweetness because he disregards his duty and sleeps the slumber of carelessness, then he will turn again to abominable fare, befouled with all impurity and uncleanness, and his conscience will not hesitate for a moment, since his soul's belly is empty. In very truth, even bitter things are sweet to the hungry soul.

The man to whom a treasure is entrusted does not sleep. If we observe the law of vigilance and practise discernment with knowledge, from which is reaped the fruit of life, then the struggle with the assaults of the passions will in no wise draw near our mind. Entrance to the heart is denied them not as a result of struggle, but because of the repletion of our conscience, and the knowledge with which our soul

is filled, and because of the desire for the wonderful divine visions to be discovered in this knowledge. These things hinder the assaults of the passions from approaching the soul, not because the soul has desisted from watchfulness and the practice of discernment (which, as I have said, guard the knowledge of the truth and the soul's light), but because the mind is not engaged in any struggle, as we have explained.

The food of the poor is vile to the rich, just as the food of the sick is to the healthy. But riches and health are preserved through vigilance and diligence. As long as a man lives, he has need of vigilance, diligence, and alertness to guard his treasure. But if he leaves his proper limits, he is overtaken by illness and is plundered. And al- [300]
though for a long time strength will persist in him because of his former state of health, yet when it receives no increase, he will be reduced to feebleness and poverty. Does not nature itself instruct us concerning these things? And what heavenly thing is there, no likeness of which can be found in our nature that enables us to speak of it? For behold, even our Lord confirmed all spiritual things by examples from the things of nature and in this manner instilled their power into our souls. And this was not only with regard to those small earnests of things yonder which we now enjoy, but also with regard to that true [*resurrected*] body and the perfection and truth that will be ours in the age to come. Do not marvel at what I say. A man must work not only until he sees the fruit, but until the very time of harvest. By harvest I mean the grave. For often ripe fruit is suddenly destroyed by a hailstorm. He who becomes enmeshed in external affairs and becomes lax in conversations cannot be assured that he continues in good health.

A Prayer O Jesus Christ, King of the ages, deem me worthy of the desire that is in Thee!

Great is the man who perseveres in converse with God, who unites his life to it; he is greater than any other man upon the earth, and this work is greater than any other performed by rational creatures.

When you pray, say this prayer: O Lord, deem me worthy to be truly dead to the converse of this world! Herein you have enclosed the entire supplication. But strive diligently also to fulfill this work in yourself, for if work follows upon prayer, then in very truth you

stand in the freedom of Christ. Mortification to the world consists not simply in refraining from taking part in intercourse with any worldly thing, but also in a man's not desiring any of the goods of the world in the intercourse of his mind.

If we accustom ourselves to a good meditation, we shall be ashamed of the passions whenever we encounter them (those who know this have experienced it within themselves), and even the very causes of the passions will make us ashamed when we draw nigh to them. When you desire to pursue some beautiful work for the love of God, put death as the limit of your desire. In this way you will be deemed worthy to ascend in actual deed to the level of martyrdom in every suffering and injury which you may encounter within this limit, provided that you patiently endure unto the end and do not grow indolent. Meditation upon an impotent thought weakens the power of patience, but a steadfast mind gives a strength that nature does not possess to the man who follows its meditation.

A Prayer O Lord, account me worthy to hate my life for the sake of the life which is in Thee!

[301] Life in the world is like a manuscript of writings that is still in rough draft. When a man wishes or desires to do so, he can add something or subtract from it, and make changes in the writings. But the life in the world to come is like documents written on clean scrolls and sealed with the royal seal, where no addition or deletion is possible. Therefore, so long as we are found in the midst of change, let us pay heed to ourselves; and while we have power over the manuscript of our life, which we have written by our own hand, let us strive earnestly to add to it by leading a good manner of life, and let us erase from it the failings of our former life. We have power to erase our debts from it as long as we are here. And God will take into account every change we make in it, so that we may be deemed worthy of eternal life before we go before the King and He sets His seal upon it. For so long as we are in this world, God does not affix His seal either to what is good or to what is evil, even up to the moment of our departure when the service of our fatherland is completed and we set out upon our journey.

And as the blessed Mar Ephraim says, we should make our soul like a ready ship that knows not when a wind will come upon it, or

like an army that knows not when the trumpet of battle will sound, or like a tenant who knows not when the master of the house will give order to depart. And if, he says, merchants are so well prepared for the sake of a little gain, though they will perhaps soon return from their voyage, how much more should we make ourselves ready, and prepare ourselves in advance, before the coming of that decisive day, that bridge and door into the new age? May Christ, the Mediator of our life, grant us to arrive at that decisive judgment in full preparation, He that hath glory, worship, and thanksgiving unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 63

On why men who are unspiritual in their knowledge investigate spiritual things in accord with the grossness of their flesh; and on how the mind can be raised above the grossness of the flesh, and what is the cause that a man is not liberated from it; and on when and by what means the mind can remain without phantasies at the time of entreaty

BLESSED BE THE MAJESTY OF THE LORD Who opens the door before us, so that we might have no other wish save the desire of Him! For thus do we abandon all things and our mind goes forth in quest of Him alone, having no care which might hinder it from the divine vision of the Lord. The more the mind takes leave of care for these visible things, my beloved brethren, and is concerned with the hope of future things (according to the measure of its elevation above care for the body and all deliberation with respect to such care), the more it is refined and becomes translucent in prayer. And the more the body is freed from the bonds of worldly affairs, the more the mind is also made free. The more the mind is freed from the bonds of worldly concerns, the more it becomes limpid; and the more limpid it becomes, the more it is refined; and the more it is refined, it is exalted above the thoughts of this age which bear the stamp of grossness. Then the mind will know how to behold God as He is and not as we are.

If a man does not first become worthy of revelation, he is not able to know it. And if he does not enter into purity, his thoughts will not be limpid so as to behold secret things. Until a man is liberated from all visible things by this acquisition of his, he will not be free of conceptions about them, nor will he be void of thoughts that bring darkness. And where there is darkness and the web of thoughts, there also are the passions. For if a man is not liberated from all these and from their causes, as we have said, his mind will not look upon secret things.

Therefore the Lord gave as a commandment that before all else a man should hold fast to non-possessiveness, and withdraw from the turmoil of the world, and release himself from the cares common to all men. He said, 'Whosoever forsaketh not his entire human state and all that belongeth to him, and renounceth not himself, he cannot be My disciple.' Luke 14:33

Now He said this in order that a man's mind should not be harmed by sight, hearing, concern for worldly things – either through their increase or loss – or by men. And by binding our mind with hope in Him alone, the Lord has turned toward Himself the entire concern of our thoughts; He has bound in Himself the entire care of our thinking through our being set free from all things, so that by reason of this we may ardently desire converse with Him in our perpetual concern for Him alone.

But prayer also is in need of exercise, so that by its prolonged practice the mind may gain wisdom. For after we have acquired non-possessiveness, which frees our thoughts from bonds, prayer requires long continuance, because the mind is trained by perseverance and much time. Thus it knows to banish its deliberations, and learns from much experience that which it cannot gain from elsewhere. Every discipline is strengthened by the discipline which precedes it, and that which comes before it is necessary for the discovery of what follows it. Seclusion precedes prayer, and seclusion itself comes about for the sake of prayer. Prayer is necessary for acquiring the love of God, because from prayer we discover the causes for loving God.

We must also know, my beloved, that every secret converse, every good care of the mind directed toward God, and every meditation upon spiritual things is delimited by prayer, is called by the name of prayer, and under its name is comprehended – whether you speak of various readings, or the cries of a mouth glorifying God, or sorrowing reflection on the Lord, or making bows with the body, or psalmody in verses, or all the other things from which the teaching of genuine prayer ensues.

From genuine prayer, the love of God is born; for love comes of prayer, and prayer from the practice of seclusion. We have need of seclusion, that we may have the possibility to converse with God by ourselves. But seclusion is preceded by the abandonment of the

world. For if a man does not first abandon the world and abstain from all that is in it, he will not be able to dwell in solitude. And again, abandonment of the world is preceded by patient endurance. Patience is preceded by hatred of the world, and hatred of the world is
[304] preceded by fear and yearning. For if the fear of Gehenna does not terrify the mind, and if yearning does not make it long for the [*future*] blessings, a man will not experience the hatred of this world. If he does not hate the world, he will not be able patiently to endure the deprivation of its companionship and comfort. If the mind has not first acquired patience, a man will be unable to choose a wild and desolate place, bereft of any inhabitants. And if he does not choose for himself a life of seclusion, he will be unable to persevere in prayer. And if he does not constantly converse with God and continue in those deliberations that are commingled with prayer, and in the various forms of the teaching of prayer (which we mentioned above), then he will never come to a perception of love.

The love of God, therefore, comes by converse with Him; the converse of prayer comes through stillness; stillness comes through non-possessiveness; non-possessiveness through patience; patience through the hatred of passionate desires; the hatred of passionate desires is born of the fear of Gehenna and the earnest expectation of blessings. The passionate desires are hated by the man who knows their fruits, and what they prepare for him, and of what good things they deprive him. Thus every discipline is connected with that which precedes it, and takes increase from it, and proceeds to another which is higher. But if one of these middle ones should fail, those following will be unable to stand, and it will appear that all are undone and lost. What is more than this lies beyond explanation. But to our God be glory and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 64

On prayer, prostrations, tears, reading, silence, and hymnody. Excellent admonitions that teach watchfulness and rules for an ascetical way of life, that by them a man may acquire for himself a comely rank

REPENTANCE IS THE MOTHER OF LIFE. It opens its door to us when we take flight from all things. The grace that we have lost after baptism by leading lax lives, repentance renews in us through the discernment of the understanding. By water and Spirit we have put on Christ, though we did not perceive His glory. Through repentance we enter into His delight by means of the discerning knowledge that dawns within us.

John 3:5; Gal. 3:27

He who is deprived of repentance is deprived of the delight to come; he who is close to all, is far from repentance; but he who is far from all with discernment repents in very truth. When a man goes far away from men and concentrates himself, then immediately the thoughts of repentance will be imprinted in his understanding. He receives from grace the seed of life, and the sorrow of discernment stirs within him like a babe in the womb, and in his heart throbs the recollection of the life of the age to come, expectation of the resurrection, and reflection upon the judgment.

Do not think that without divine grace contrition can descend into the mind. Through a spiritual gift, the mind receives contrition secretly by divine mercy in [*the form of*] sudden compunction with the incentive to [*seek*] salvation. As Abba Evagrius[1] says, 'Fervent com-

1. Evagrius was born in Pontus of Asia Minor in the mid 4th cent. After enjoying the friendship of St. Basil and St. Gregory, he retired to the deserts of Egypt where he dwelt with various Egyptian fathers. Some of his writings were, however, strongly influenced by his studies of Origen and for this reason they were condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (A.D. 553). Before this time a Syriac translation was made of his writings which suppressed clearly heterodox statements and, consequently, enjoyed much popularity among Syriac-speaking monastics. Although in 7th-cent. Persia some doubts were expressed about certain teachings, most of his writings continued to be held in great esteem. See also the Introduction, p. 79, note 70.

punction of soul is a purifying herb; through the holy angels the Lord gives it for diligent cleansing of passions to those who repent.' And again he says, 'Fervent compunction of soul is the fire of a furnace that by Christ's grace comes upon the soul at the time of prayer, and thereupon the faculty of recollection attains to divine vision. The lack of compunction, however, is cured by living water.'

The beginning of repentance is unfeigned humility. Elegance of clothing is the disruption of repentance.

The path to wisdom is orderly control of the limbs. The dissipation of the body is the confusion of wisdom. True wisdom is gazing at God. Gazing at God is silence of the thoughts. Stillness of the thinking is the quietness of discernment. The distraction of the senses is a well-spring of thoughts.

Perception of God is an abyss of humility.

True *theoria* is mortification of the heart. A heart that is truly dead to the world is wholly astir in God. True mortification is the movement of life.

It is better to breathe in life by staying away from all, than to edify the living by departure from breathing.[2]

Better is he who edifies his soul than he who edifies the whole world.

It is better to imbibe life than to distribute life.

He whose outward members are dead, his inward motions are alive. He whose outward members are alive, deadens the members of wisdom.

The humility of discernment is true knowledge. True knowledge is a fountain of humility.

He who is humble in heart is humble in body. He who is shameless in his body is shameless in his heart. He who is agitated in body is agitated in his heart. He who is agitated in his heart is frivolous in mind. The man who is frivolous in mind, evil are his ways. He whose way is evil is dead during his life.

If you love humility, do not be a lover of adornment. The man who loves adornment cannot endure contempt. It is hard for him to undertake lowly works, and he is ashamed to submit himself to his inferior.

2. Perhaps this means *to die for some noble cause.*

The servant of God does not adorn his body. Know that anyone who loves to adorn his body, though he possesses excellent works, is sickly in his conscience. No man who is enamored of visible affluence is able to acquire true love for anybody. Everyone who runs after honors is a slave of this world. If all who do such things are hateful to you, then be far from these things yourself. Humility and chastity are assisted by one and the same kind of reproach. But do not seek the [307] truth of these matters from a man who loves honor and adornment.

If you love chastity, do not love wandering about. The occurrences that befall you by reason of your wandering do not allow you vigilantly to retain chastity in your soul. No man who loves wandering possesses chastity. And do not believe that anyone who is entangled with men of this world is humble. Every man who loves God loves a quiet life. It is impossible for a man who wanders about to preserve the truth untainted in his soul.

Many show an appearance of repentance, but no one truly possesses it save the man who is pained in his heart. Many run to find pain of heart, but no one finds it in very truth save he who possesses unremitting silence. Every man who is a servant of God loves contrition. Know that every loquacious man, even though he relates amazing things, is empty within. Inward sorrow is a bridle for the senses. If you love the truth, love silence; it will make you illumined in God like the sun, and will deliver you from the illusions of ignorance. Silence unites you to God Himself.

Whenever you find it delightful to kneel [*in prayer*], do not be carried off [*by the thought*] to put an end to it. Would that this were never cut short for as long as you are in this life! And whenever your mind is concentrated, do not cut off your prayer.

Do not count as idleness the protraction of unwandering concentrated prayer because you abandon the psalms [*for the sake of it*]. More than the practice of psalmody, love prostrations during prayer. When prayer gives you her hand she will take the place of your office. And when at the very time of your office you are granted the gift of tears, do not count the delight which you find in them as an interruption of your liturgy. For the fullness of prayer is the gift of tears.

Do not be surprised if sometimes when you are kneeling in prayer and your mind is concentrated upon it, your mind grows silent and

desists from prayer. You will find this to occur both in your office and in reading. At the time when your mind is scattered, persevere in reading rather than in prayer. The course of your reading should be parallel to the aim of your way of life. Not all books, however, are profitable for the concentration of the mind. Most books that contain instruction [*in doctrine*] are not useful for purification. The reading of many diverse books lets loose upon you distraction of mind. Know, then, that not every book that teaches about religion is useful for the purification of the conscience and the concentration of the thoughts. But do not dispute about the precise truth of these things with a man who does not know the truth.

Love stillness far more than labors. Give more honor to reading, if possible, than to standing, for it is a source of pure prayer. But do not
[308] neglect standing entirely, and be on the alert against mental wandering. Psalmody is the root of the ascetic discipline. Know also that psalmody even when recited with a wandering mind is more profitable than labor of the body.[3] Sorrow of mind is superior to bodily toil. In a period of lethargy be vigilant and stir up your zeal a little, for zeal greatly wakens the heart and inflames the thoughts of the soul. Just as natural anger is a help against lust, so it is also in a time of lethargy, because it melts coldness of soul. Lethargy usually comes upon us from one of these reasons: either from an overladen stomach, or from exhaustion caused by works.

Good order in one's labor is a light to the understanding. There is nothing like knowledge. Let every prayer that you offer in the night be more precious in your eyes than all your activities of the day. Do not weigh down your belly, lest your mind become confused and be troubled with mental wandering when you stand up at night, and lest your members be enervated and you find yourself filled with womanish languor. Nay more, lest, while your soul is darkened and your thoughts are turbid, you should not be able to collect your thoughts at all in your psalmody on account of that darkness. And further, lest the taste of all things should become insipid to you, and the verses chanted in your psalmody should hold no sweetness for you, that

3. This is the reading of the Syriac MSS and the Syriac printed text. The Greek MSS and the Greek printed text say the opposite here, namely *that labors of the body will profit more than psalmody recited with a wandering mind.*

very psalmody the variation of which your mind was wont to savor with delight through the acuteness and lucidity of your understanding.

When the good order of the night's discipline is disturbed, then during the labor of the day the mind also becomes confused; it travels in darkness and it does not take delight in reading, as it is accustomed to do. For whether it is moved to prayer or to study, confusion assails its thoughts like a hurricane. The delight given to ascetics by day pours forth upon their pure mind from the light obtained by their night's activity. From a man who has not gained experience of prolonged stillness do not expect to learn anything further about the good things of asceticism, even if he is a great sage and a teacher, having many achievements behind him.

Be on your guard, moreover, not to exhaust your body completely, lest lethargy gain strength against you and chill your soul to the savor of her work. It behooves every man to weigh his discipline as though on scales. At a time when you have taken your fill, be on your guard for a while against being free with yourself. Let your sitting be in chastity at the time of your bodily need. But most of all, be chaste and pure when you are going to sleep, and be closely observant not only of your thoughts, but also of your members. Beware of conceit at the time of changes toward the good. In your prayer earnestly show the Lord your weakness and your unskillfulness before the subtlety of conceit, lest you be given up to be tempted in shameful things. For [309]
fornication follows upon pride; and upon conceit, delusion.

Labor at the work of your hands according to your need, or rather, so as to bind yourself to your stillness. Be not weak in your trust in your Provider, for God's wonderful dispensations take place among the members of His household; and even without employing the hands of men He provides for those who dwell in the uninhabited desert waste and trust in Him. If the Lord should visit you with respect to bodily matters when you are struggling uniquely in the care of your soul, and the thought is roused in you that the credit for all this provision is due entirely to yourself, it is from the wiles of the devil, the manslayer. As soon as you accept this thought, the provi- John 8:44
sion of God will be withheld from you and at the same moment a vast number of temptations will break out against you, either from the

negligence of the [*brother*] who provides for you, or from the renewal of the pains and sicknesses of your body.

Now God does not turn away from us on account of the mere movement of a thought, but only when our mind persists in it. For God does not chastise and judge a man for an involuntary movement, not even if we agree with it for a moment. And if, at the very moment when we spur the passion on, compunction should overtake us, then the Lord will not call us to account for such negligence. Yet He does call us to account for that which our thinking has truly accepted, and looks upon shamelessly, and has accepted as fitting and profitable, not considering it a terrible thing to muse upon it. Let us always pray this prayer to the Lord: O Christ, the Fullness of truth, let Thy truth dawn in our hearts that we may know to walk in Thy way according to Thy will!

When an evil thought is newly sown in you, either about things afar off or about those formerly known, and it manifests itself constantly in your mind, then know most certainly that it lays a snare for you; awaken yourself, and be alert in time. If, however, it is among those things that come from the right hand, from the good side, then know that God wishes to grant you a certain means of life, and for this reason it is ceaselessly stirred within you in this unusual manner.

But if it is an obscure thought and you are in doubt concerning it, and you cannot distinguish clearly if it is one of your own, or whether it is a thief, a helper, or a foe in ambush hidden under a fair guise: then prepare yourself against it with prolonged and the most intense prayer, both night and day, with much vigil. Do not thrust it away, yet do not agree with it; but make your prayer in earnest and with ardor concerning it. Do not be silent in calling upon the Lord, and He Himself will show you from whence it comes.

[310]

On silence

Love silence above all things, because it brings you near to fruit that the tongue cannot express. First let us force ourselves to be silent, and then from out of this silence something is born that leads us into silence itself. May God grant you to perceive some part of that which is born of silence! If you begin with this discipline, I know not how much light will dawn on you from it. Do not infer, O brother,

from what is said of that wondrous man Arsenius, that when the fathers would visit him, and the brethren would come to see him, and he would sit with them and remain silent, and in silence let them go – do not infer, I say, that he did this completely voluntarily, except at the beginning when he used to force himself to it.

After a time, a certain sweetness is born in the heart from the practice of this labor, and it leads the body by force to persevere in stillness. A multitude of tears is born to us in this discipline through a wonderful divine vision of something that the heart distinctly perceives, sometimes with pain, sometimes with amazement. For the heart humbles herself and becomes like a tiny babe, and as soon as she begins to pray, tears flow forth in advance of her prayer.

Great is the man who by the patience of his members achieves wondrous habits in his soul! When you put all the works of this discipline on one side and silence on the other, you will find the latter to be greater in weight. The admonitions of the Fathers are many. When a man draws near to silence, the keeping of these is superfluous for him, and works themselves become superfluous; he is found to have gone beyond them, for he has approached perfection.

Silence is also an aid to stillness. How is this? Because it is impossible, when we dwell in a place inhabited by many, that we should not be met by other men. And neither was that peer of the angels, Arsenius, who loved stillness more than all other men, able to escape this. For we are obliged to encounter the fathers and brethren who dwell with us, and sometimes we meet them unexpectedly, since a man cannot avoid going to church or elsewhere. When, therefore, that man who is worthily called blessed beheld all these things, and saw that it would not be possible to avoid them as long as he was near the habitation of men; and when he found that it was often impossible, because of the place of his abode, to be far withdrawn from the proximity of men and from the monks who settled in those parts – then from grace he learned this way of life: unbroken silence. And if out of necessity he ever opened his door to some of them, they were gladdened only by the mere sight of him; but conversation with words, [311]
and its employment, were rendered superfluous between them.

By this sight alone, many of the fathers also reached the condition of being able to keep guard on themselves, and they gained an in-

crease of spiritual riches from the instruction they received from the sight of this blessed man. They continually saw him abiding in stillness, so that of the many of them, there was one who put a stone in his mouth,[4] and one who bound his loins with a rope within [*his clothes*] as [*an aid to*] recollection; or they exhausted themselves with extreme fasting whenever they went out to the society of men, because hunger avails much in the constraint of the senses. And many did these things so as to acquire that watchfulness over oneself which is so comely to look upon and which makes one a possessor of life.

O brother, I have found many fathers, great and wonderful men, who cared more for the good ordering of the senses and the behavior of the body than for labors. For out of this is born good order of the thoughts. There are many causes that confront a man independently of his will and make him go beyond the limits set by his free will. And unless he is found on his guard over the senses through a continuous habit previously formed within him, they will prevent him for a long time from coming to himself and finding his former peaceful state.

The heart's progress is reflection upon its hope. Progress in our discipline is release from all things. The remembrance of death is a good fetter for the outward members. A lure for our soul drawing her toward life is the joy that blossoms forth in the heart from hope. A draught of knowledge is continual trials that the mind receives each day from within because of our two changes.[5] The budding of the heart is conviction in the resurrection through faith that hope receives inwardly.

Deem me worthy, my Lord, to behold Thy mercy in my soul before I depart this world, and at that hour to sense comfort within me, along with those who in good hope have gone forth from this world. Open my heart, O my God, by Thy grace, and purify me from communion with sin. Make smooth in my heart the path of repentance, my God and my Lord, my hope and my boast, my strong refuge, by Whom mine eyes are illuminated, and give me understanding through Thy truth. Deem me worthy, O my Lord, to taste the delight of the gift of repentance, whereby the soul is separated from the

4. Abba Agatho, who for three years kept a stone in his mouth 'until he had learned thoroughly how to hold his peace.' Budge, *PHF*, Vol. II, pp. 15–16, #61.

5. I.e. to the left and right, toward evil and good.

working of sin and the will of flesh and blood. Deem me worthy, my Lord, to taste contrition, wherein the gift of pure prayer is laid up. May I attain, my Saviour, to the wondrous crossing whereby the soul forsakes the visible world and there arise in her new thoughts for entrance into the spiritual world, and the experience of new perceptions!

The man who begins and finishes well lays his way of life upon [312] this foundation, and he unceasingly entreats God that he be accounted worthy of this very perception. For herein is planted the knowledge of that future state through imperishable hope, the state which is reserved for men by God's grace until the consummation of this world. But the man who starts out in the reverse way goes from above downward. That is, he begins with joy and ends with lamentation, and he is devoid of knowledge and hope like an unformed body, one that has not reached perfection through the reception of a soul because it has not completed its period of gestation in the womb and gained the maturity of formed life.

Scorn for converse with the world is a sign of a soul that has perceived her hope. Secret wakefulness is sleepiness to things visible. The heart's weapon is faith in Christ. The man who in the desire of his hope even defies death reckons death as naught, and he disregards the barrenness of the place where he dwells, his battles with the demons, his estrangement from men, and his abstinence from the consolations of this world. What, indeed, is the consolation derived from visible things and association with them, in comparison to the delight of hope that is perceived in the heart? For he is like a man who has lost consciousness of his body by reason of the inebriation of his joy. And by reason of the burning fervor of his faith that inflames his heart, all visible things are hidden from him, and he does not know that he is found in creation, because of his body's ardor and his soul's intellections. And by the faith of his mind it seems to him that he is like a man who already stands in that Kingdom.

Though at times despondency befalls us on account of our solitude (allowed, perhaps, by way of divine economy), yet through the faith of our heart, we possess the ineffable consolation of faith whereby we reckon afflictions and even death as naught. Well did one of the God-bearing Fathers say, 'Ardent love of God is sufficient consola-

tion for a believer even though he should lose his life.' For, as it is said, what harm can tribulations do to a man who holds luxury and ease in contempt for the sake of the good things to come?

I advise you this also, my brother: let the scale of mercy always be preponderant within you, until you perceive in yourself that mercy which God has for the world. Let this our state become a mirror where we may see in ourselves that likeness and true image which naturally belong to the Divine Essence. By these things and their like we are enlightened so as to be moved toward God with a limpid understanding. A harsh and merciless heart will never be purified. A merciful man is the physician of his own soul, for as with a violent wind he drives the darkness of the passions out of his inner self. This [313] is a good investment to make with God, according to the Gospel's Matt. 5:7 word of life, 'Blessed is the merciful man, for he shall obtain mercy,' not only yonder, but here also in a mystical way. Indeed, what mercy is greater than this? – even that when a man is moved with compassion for a fellow man and becomes a partaker in his suffering, our Lord delivers his soul from the gloom of darkness – which is the noetic Gehenna – and brings her into the light of life, thus filling her with delight. Well has Evagrius said, 'A clear pathway comes from showing mercy.'

Therefore, as I said, let a merciful heart preside over your entire discipline, and you will be at peace with God. Take heed lest at any time evil should befall someone by your agency, even if he be an evil man. And when it is in your power to deliver the iniquitous man from evil, do not neglect to do so. I do not mean that if the affair is far removed from you, you should go and cast yourself into works of this sort, for deeds of this kind do not belong to your way of life. If, however, the affair is placed directly into your hands and is within your power (for in such a case, as an accidental occurrence, the affair has come to you as a trial, as it were, and God by His permission has brought it upon you to prove you), then take heed to yourself lest you become a partaker of the blood of the iniquitous man by not taking pains to deliver him; but rather try with your whole soul to rescue him, even to the point of dying for his sake. At that hour you will be a martyr in very truth and will be like Him Who for the sake of sinners accepted death on the Cross. Entreat God that this [*opportunity*]

may not escape you. But even though a man be worthy of receiving evil, let him receive the judgment of his deed at the hands of others. It is not your business to look into the worthiness of his deeds. Let only good come upon him at your hands.

Bring to mind Him Who upholds all things, and how the deeds of every man are before His eyes, and they stand out before Him more clearly than the sun; and remember that by the mere breath of His mouth He is able to destroy all men if He so wished. You, however, have not been appointed to decree vengeance upon men's deeds and works, but rather to ask for mercy for the world, to keep vigil for the salvation of all, and to partake in every man's suffering, both the just and sinners. Know further that if a man is worthy [*of retribution*], then not much time will pass before justice binds him fast by the hands of others who are apt for this work. Thus you will save your soul and become a living martyr. Still, not even this should you pray for or reflect upon, but you should make supplication that God's mercy come upon him so that he be changed and become conformed to God's will, and that he depart life in righteousness and not in retribution for iniquity.

Instead of an avenger, be a deliverer. Instead of a faultfinder, be a soother. Instead of a betrayer,[6] be a martyr. Instead of a chider, be a [314]
defender. Beseech God in behalf of sinners that they receive mercy, and pray to Him for the righteous that they be preserved [*in their righteousness*]. Conquer evil men by your gentle kindness, and make zealous men wonder at your goodness. Put the lover of justice to shame by your compassion. With the afflicted be afflicted in mind. Love all men, but keep distant from all men. Recollect death and prepare yourself for your entrance thither, and set your course in order. Remember that the sins of all men go before them to the judgment seat.

Do not fall into despair because of stumblings. I do not mean that you should not feel contrition for them, but that you should not think them incurable. For it is more expedient to be bruised than dead. There is, indeed, a Healer for the man who has stumbled, even He Who on the Cross asked that mercy be shown to His crucifiers, He Who pardoned His murderers while He hung on the Cross. 'All man- Luke 23:34

6. I.e. one who gives another over to punishment.

Matt. 12:31 ner of sin,' He said, 'and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men,' that is, through repentance. For a brief moment of mourning He pardoned Simon who had denied Him, and after His resurrection He commanded him to become the head of His flock. Three times He
John 21:15–17 asked him, 'Lovest thou Me?' on account of his threefold denial of Him, so as to confirm his pardon. Christ came in behalf of sinners, to heal the broken of heart and to bandage their wounds. 'The Spirit of the Lord,' He says, 'is upon Me, to preach good tidings unto the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim forgiveness
Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18 to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind,' and to strengthen the bruised by forgiveness. And the Apostle says in his epistle, 'Jesus
1 Tim. 1:15 Christ came into the world to save sinners.' And his Lord also testifies, 'I am come not to call the righteous, for they that are whole have
Mark 2:17 no need of a physician, but they that are sick.' Further, He says that a certain creditor had two debtors and because neither had the wherewithal to repay him, he forgave them both – when, that is, they en-
Luke 7:41–42 treated him.

Our frail nature would not be strong enough if God's justice were to rise up to take vengeance.[7] Therefore He employs mercy, since at all times we are held by debt. But do not sin, O man, expecting that you will repent; and do not succumb [*to sin*] being confident of forgiveness! Remember that death will not delay. Do not craftily seek means to draw nigh to the pleasure of sin with a knavish mind! God
Gal. 6:7 is not mocked. His knowledge precedes your thoughts. Affliction will overtake you suddenly, and when you cry out, He will not answer you.

When you approach your bed, say to it, 'This very night, per-
[315] chance, you will be my tomb, O bed; for I know not whether tonight instead of a transient sleep, the eternal sleep of death will be mine.' And so, as long as you have feet, run after work, before you are bound with that bond which cannot be loosed again once it is put on. As long as you have hands, stretch them out to Heaven in prayer, before your arms fall from their joints, and though you desire to draw them up, you will not be able. As long as you have fingers, cross yourself in prayer, before death comes loosing the comely strength of their sinews. As long as you have eyes, fill them with tears in prayer

7. Or *make exaction*.

with lamentation on account of your sins, before that hour when dust will cover your black clothes, and your eyes will be fixed in one direction in an unseeing gaze and you will not know it. As long as your heart, the fountain of thoughts, is controlled by the power of discernment, think upon those things that assist your salvation, before your soul is shaken by her departure from it, and the heart is left like a house deserted by its inhabitants.

O wise man, do not be enticed by expectancy of a long life! For just as the rose wilts at a breath of the wind, so at a little puff on even one of the elements of which you are composed, your knees will suddenly grow feeble without your expecting it. And while you are thinking it is nothing and you are caring for the ailment, suddenly that stern being[8] will draw nigh, he who ridicules the wise. O the wretchedness of our nature! How we are held fast by the love of this substance wherein God does not wish to leave us!

Fix your departure in your heart, O man, by always saying to yourself: 'Behold, the messenger is at the door, he who comes for me. Why am I idle? My going forth is forever; there will be no return.' Pass the night in this reflection; muse upon this thought throughout the day. And when the time of departure comes, greet it with gladness, saying: 'Come in peace! I knew that you were coming and I have not neglected anything that could prove useful to me on the way.'

Take provisions for your long way, O wise man! Remove the heaviness of sleep from your heart, O invited guest! Set your baggage in order for departure, O sojourner! The morningtide is nigh at hand, O wayfarer; why do you sleep? Arise and prepare yourself, O mariner voyaging on the sea! Arise and make ready the tackle of your ship, for you know not at what hour the wind will carry you out! Be ready and prepared for the coming of the [*angel of death*] who will cause our form to perish. 'Their form,' it says, 'shall waste away in Sheol.'[9] They will be withdrawn from the comely glory of their nature and their bodies will become a desolate place. Recollect at all times that lamentable sight of corruption, that formless dispersion of your senses, that ruin of the edifice of your body, and how your wholesome constitution will become mud in Sheol. Blessed is the

8. I.e. the angel of death. See, for instance, 2 Kgs. 24:16.

9. Ps. 48 (49):14 in the Peshitta.

man who greets the recollection of this destruction with joy! Blessed
[316] is he who with good hope awaits that deed so replete with mystery, wherein is concealed the wonder of the Creator's power![10]

Spiritual meditation is constant and earnest expectancy of what will be after the resurrection. The inception of this reflection in the mind is the [*crossing of the*] borderline of repentance. That which retains repentance in the soul is continual rumination upon things future. The man who is moved by repentance has migrated through his hope to the world to come. But the mind of the man who has forgotten it dwells in this world.

A man who loves conversation with Christ, loves to be alone. But he who loves to linger with many is a friend of this world. Repentance is perpetual sorrow of heart while meditating on that great and inexpressible state, saying, 'How can I reach that ineffable entrance?' If you love repentance, love stillness also. For outside of stillness repentance cannot be brought to completion. And if anyone should dispute this, do not argue with him, for he knows not what he says. But if he knew what repentance is, he would also know its place, and that it cannot be brought to perfection amid turbulence. And if you love stillness, the mother of repentance, then take pleasure in the small physical discomforts, harsh reproaches, and injustices endured for its sake. For without this preparedness you will not be able to live in stillness with untroubled liberty. If you set these things at naught, then in accord with the good pleasure of God you will become a partaker of stillness and abide steadfastly in it as God wills; even if you are wronged or cheated or mocked and so forth, you will not be moved, because of your love of stillness. The ardent love of stillness is a constant expectation of death. Whoever enters into stillness without this continual rumination will not be able to bear those things that we are obliged to undergo and to endure from all sides. To die for God's sake and to live in God is the fulfillment of life. 'To ponder upon death for God's sake brings our mind to be mingled with God,' as Evagrius says.

But know this also, O man of discernment: we do not make our habitation alone with our soul, and practise stillness and seclusion, for the sake of the many works of the monastic ordinances and in

10. I.e. the resurrection of the dead.

order to accomplish these. For it is well known that fellowship with many facilitates this because of bodily vigor.[11] But if these works were necessary, there would not have been Fathers who abandoned the company and fellowship of men, some of whom inhabited tombs, and others who chose seclusion in a solitary place. Such men greatly enfeebled their bodies in this manner, and neglected them, and could not fulfill their rules because of their weakness and the physical hardship; and even when grave maladies befell them, they bore them with pleasure throughout their whole lives. Among these men were some who, on account of their weakened body, could not even stand on their feet, or offer the customary prayer, or give praise; they said no psalm and they did nothing else that is performed with the body. In- [317]
stead of all the monastic ordinances, the infirmity of their body and their stillness sufficed them. This was their way of living all the days of their life. And in all this supposed idleness not one of them wished to forsake his cell, nor, because they did not perform any of the monastic canons, did they wish to wander about outside [*their cells*] or to be gladdened by the chanting in the churches and by the divine offices performed by other men.

The man who is conscious of his sins is greater than he who profits the whole world by the sight of his countenance. The man who sighs over his soul for but one hour is greater than he who raises the dead by his prayer while dwelling amid many men. The man who is deemed worthy to see himself is greater than he who is deemed worthy to see the angels, for the latter has communion through his bodily eyes, but the former through the eyes of his soul. The man who follows Christ in solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregations of men. Let no one object here, citing what was said by the Apostle, 'I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren.' Rom. 9:3

He who has received the power of Paul is enjoined to do this. But Paul was guided by the nod that was made to him so that he should profit the whole world, as he himself bore witness, for he did not do this of his own will. 'For necessity is laid upon me,' he says, 'yea, woe unto me, if I preach not the Gospel.' And the election of Paul had in 1 Cor. 9:16

11. I.e. the body is better sustained in a community and has more strength to complete the various regulations.

view not the course of his own repentance, but the preaching of the Gospel to mankind, and he received superabundant power.

Let us then love stillness, my brethren, until the world is made to die in our heart. Let us always remember death, and by this meditation let us approach God with our heart, despise the vanity of the world, and hold its pleasure as something contemptible. With a sickly body let us gladly endure the continual idleness of stillness, so that we may be deemed worthy of delight together with those who, in the dens and caves of the earth, await the lauded revelation of the Lord from Heaven. For to Him, and to His Father, and to His Holy Spirit be glory, honor, dominion, and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 65

An epistle of our Father among the Saints Isaac the Syrian, sent to his friend, wherein he expounds things respecting the mysteries of stillness, and how many monks, being ignorant of these things, are negligent in this wonderful activity, and that the majority of them hold on to their cells by reason of the tradition current among monks; and together with this, a brief collection of sayings useful for the practice of stillness

BEING OBLIGED BY DUTY to write to you concerning necessary things, O brother, I am acknowledging your love by my letter in accord with the promise which I gave you. Because I have found you determined to run the course of abiding in stillness with exacting discipline, I have taken the concise sense of the words I heard from discerning men about the work of stillness and combined it with my own first-hand experience of these things. This I shall imprint in your memory with this short writing; and you, on your part, will help yourself by this epistle if you read it with your accustomed zeal. For you will not approach the reading of the sayings gathered in our epistle as some ordinary reading, but with the understanding of wisdom, and you will receive it as a light for your other reading because of the great power hidden in it. For the mind is greatly strengthened by reading such things, and from this it receives a weapon against the distraction of the thoughts and against the despondency that is wont to arise from severe labors and prolonged dwelling in stillness. By means of the ardor with which it is clothed by what it encounters in reading, it turns its back on the world while caring for its own activities.

And this is the aim of this epistle: that you might learn what is the life of stillness, what is its work, what mysteries are concealed in this discipline, mysteries that are hidden from many, but after the discovery of which strenuous men run, seeking to attain them in stillness, and why some men belittle the righteousness that is practised in the

society of men and prefer to it the tribulations and struggles of a silent and solitary abode. From the understanding of these things and because of what they find in this epistle, men will call blessed the solitaries who pass their lives in this world by remaining concentrated and by themselves. But to those who have no acquaintance with these matters this instruction, with all its admonitions, about the stages that are in stillness will be superfluous. I write here to wise men, and I offer advice with love.

If you wish to find imperishable life in your short days, O brother, let your entry into stillness be made with discretion, that you may find the profit that wise men expect to gain by the discipline of solitude. Investigate its work and do not run after a name, but enter, delve, strive, learn, attain, and practise all the wondrous, noble ways of the work of stillness, so as to comprehend together with all the
Eph. 3:18 saints what is the depth and height and breadth and length of this infinite discipline. For the riches that its merchants strive to acquire are without limit. Do not rest until you have gone throughout all the pathways of its works. In every human action, from its commencement to its completion, there is a means employed and a hope that looks for some profit from the action, and this it is that spurs on the mind to lay a foundation for doing it. This aim fortifies the mind to endure the hardship of the work, and the mind receives consolation from gazing toward its goal. And like a warden, this goal holds the understanding fast until the deed is done.

For the discerning man, the venerable work of stillness is a haven of mysteries, a goal toward which the mind gazes from the beginning of the construction till the completion of the edifice and in all a man's prolonged and difficult labors. And as the eyes of the helmsman look to the stars, so the solitary throughout the whole course of his journey looks, with the inner eye of divine vision, to the goal which he fixed in his mind from the first day when he gave himself to voyaging over the billowy sea of stillness, until he discovers that pearl for the sake of which he set off into the unfathomable deep of the ocean of stillness. The watchful gaze of his expectation makes light for him the heavy burden of his labor and the perilous hardships which befall him on his way.

Whoever does not fix this aim in himself when he begins to prac-

tise stillness, labors without judgment in that work which is his duty, even as one who beats the air. Such a man will never be liberated from the spirit of despondency throughout his whole life. And one of two things befalls him: either he cannot endure the insufferable burden, and is defeated, and completely abandons stillness; or, if he perseveres in it, his cell becomes for him a dungeon, and he is fried therein because he does not know to rest his hope on the consolation that is born of the work of stillness. For this reason he cannot even make entreaty with pain of heart, or weep in prayer, or aspire to those things that our Fathers, being filled with mercy and loving their children, have left in their writings as tokens for the needs of our life.

1 Cor. 9:26

[320]

Now one of them said, 'The profit that I gain from stillness is this: when I depart from the dwelling wherein I abide, my mind is void of the preparations of war and turns to a superior activity.'

Likewise another said: 'I run to stillness so that the verses of my reading and prayer should be sweet to me. And when my tongue is silent because of the sweetness that comes from understanding them, then, as it were into a kind of sleep, I fall into a state where my senses and my thoughts become inactive. When from prolonged stillness my heart is tranquil and undisturbed by the turmoil of recollections, waves of joy ceaselessly surge over me, waves arising from inward stirrings that beyond expectation suddenly pour abroad to delight my heart. And when these waves approach the barque of my soul, they plunge her into veritable wonders in the stillness which is in God, taking her far from the whisperings of the world and the life of the flesh.'

And another used to say: 'Stillness cuts off the occasions and causes that renew thoughts, while within its walls it makes the memories of predispositions grow old and wither. And when this old material wastes away in the mind, the understanding returns to its own nature and directs it.'

And again another said: 'You will know the degree of what lies hidden within you from the difference of your reflections, I mean those which you have continually, not those set astir by some circumstance and which pass away after an interval of time. There is no man clad in a body whose dwelling is not visited by a wayfarer from the two changes of good and evil. If a man is zealous, on account of na-

ture he is visited by changes in insignificant matters, for fathers are the fathers of their children; while if he is indolent, he is visited by changes in lofty matters on account of the leaven of that grace which was poured into our nature, because of which it has become related to the family of the Kingdom on high.'[1]

Another said: 'Choose for yourself a work filled with delight: constant night-vigil, whereby all the Fathers stripped off the old man and
Rom. 12:2 were accounted worthy of the renewal of the mind. During those
[321] hours the soul experiences that immortal life, and by means of this experience she puts off the vesture of darkness and receives the gifts of the Spirit.'

And another used to say: 'When a man sees different faces and hears many kinds of voices foreign to his spiritual meditation, and he converses and holds intercourse with them, his mind will not be free so that he can see himself in secret, remember his sins, refute his thoughts, pay attention to what befalls him, and attend to hidden prayer.'

And again: 'It is impossible without stillness and estrangement from men to bring the senses into submission to the sovereignty of the soul. For the noetic soul is hypostatically united and conjoined with the senses and it is involuntarily carried away by her thoughts, unless a man is vigilant in secret prayer.'

And again: 'O how greatly does vigil by its wakefulness, together with prayer and reading, cause delight, gladden, rejoice, and cleanse the soul! This is known pre-eminently by those who practise these things throughout the whole of their lives and struggle in strict and exacting asceticism.'

Therefore, O man, you that love stillness, place before yourself these indications, taken from the teaching of the words of the Fathers, as a sort of target, and direct the course of your labor so as to draw near to them. But before all, prudently seek out what is most suited to agree with the aim of your labor, for without these practices you will be unable to know the knowledge of the truth. Wherefore I tell you, strive beyond measure to show your perseverance in them.

1. This passage is obscure. In our understanding the saint says that the indolent man is subject to serious falls because he neglected and trampled upon the grace he received.

Silence is a mystery of the age to come, but words are instruments of this world. A faster endeavors to make his soul like unto the nature of spiritual beings. Through silence and continual fasting, a man sets himself apart so as to persevere in his divine labor within his hidden self. In these same mysteries[2] the invisible hosts perform the liturgy that is filled with divine mysteries and the holiness of the Supreme Being Who rules the ages. Some of the saints set themselves apart in order to enter into the mysteries of God and were marked by this seal; some were entrusted with the governance of a mighty people; others were entrusted to receive authority over the elements, and by a great wonder the natures of created things were obedient to the command of their words; and some of them were entrusted with revealing hidden things, concealed in the secret silence of the Lord, for the renewing of those who are in the middle state. Indeed, it would not have been fitting that such mysteries should be administered by men whose belly is full and whose mind is confused because of intemperance. The saints, however, did not dare to converse with God [322] or raise themselves toward His hidden mysteries, unless their limbs were weak, their color pale by reason of gnawing hunger, and their mind quiet in its perceptivity through renunciation of every earthly thought.

When the power of stillness overshadows you on account of prolonged abiding in your cell, laborious works, watchfulness over hidden things, and restraint of the senses from every encounter, then at first you will find a joy which without cause overcomes your soul at times and seasons; and thereupon according to the degree of your purity your eyes will be opened to see God's creative power and the beauty of created things. And when the mind is guided by the wonder of this divine vision, then night and day will be as one to it, because of its awe at the glorious creations of God. Hereafter the awareness of the passions is stolen from the very soul herself by the sweetness of this divine vision, and by means of divine vision she enters into the two levels of noetic revelations which are placed in order after this one, which both come of purity, and transcend it. May God deem us worthy of them. Amen.

2. I.e. silence and fasting.

Homily 66

A study and elucidation with examples concerning diverse concepts, and on what use each one of them has

THE MIND is the organ of spiritual perception made to receive the power of vision, like the pupils of the bodily eyes into which visible light is poured. Noetic vision is natural knowledge that is united by this power to the natural state, and it is called natural light.

The power that is holy is grace, the sun that enables discernment among things that lie between the light and vision. Whereas natures are things that are intermediate and become discernible for vision by means of light, passions are like some hard substances that, standing in the midst between the light and vision, prevent the latter from discerning the difference of things.

Purity is the translucence of the noetic air, and in the bosom of this air, our nature takes wing. If the mind is not sound and healthy in its natural properties, knowledge is not active in it, just as when bodily sense has been somehow impaired, it is deprived of sight. But if the mind is sound, and still there is no knowledge, then the mind, lacking it, is unable to make a distinction between spiritual things, just as an eye, although it is sound and healthy in all things pertaining to it, is often dull with respect to its visual power. And if these things[1] are preserved in their own state, but grace is not near them, they all remain inoperative in the work of discernment, just as in the hours of the night, because of the sun's absence, they remain unseeing (I mean the eye and the faculty of vision, but not what is or is not discerned) even though they should be completely sound and perfect in what pertains to them. And this is the meaning of what has been said, 'In
Ps. 35:10 Thy light shall we see light.'

Now even if grace, the noetic sun, should draw nigh and inspire the soul to yearning, incite her, and make her vigilant, but there be no

1. I.e. the mind, noetic vision, etc.

purity in her (through which, as through air that is cleansed from the density of clouds and darkening matter, the rays of that sun[2] easily stretch out toward us and in their pleasant light we are gladdened by the sweetness of a vision that is wholly spiritual), then vision is impeded in the work of discernment, and thereupon nature ceases from righteous activity (*praxis*). Thus the soul is prevented from perceiving the sweetness of the second sun[3] (which sheds its light upon all things) because of a corporeal blanket that overlies her and shrouds her from the illuminations of the truth, obstructing their path toward us.

Therefore all the things aforementioned must necessarily be sought out. And because it is difficult to find them all in one man without some deficiency and taint, most men are unable to attain to a degree of perfection in spiritual knowledge. The absence of these things, however, is caused by the mind's insufficiency, undirectedness of will, a disposition not corresponding to a man's aim, lack of purity, being unable to find a teacher and guide, a cessation of grace ('Riches are not comely for a niggardly man,' it says, nor to have dominion over great things), and the hindrances of times, places, and means. Ecclus. 14:3

*A selection of short sections**

You know, my brethren, that the eye of sense perception by its visual power alone (which is sent forth from the brain to the eye by a sort of channel), cannot perceive distinctions among objects unless it partakes of some other light. Now in this respect all natural sense perceptions are ordered in the same manner as the intellections of the spiritual state. And unless the natural power of the mind (which is also the soul's knowledge) receives divine light, the soul cannot partake of truth by means of *theoria*. *Theoria* arises from a virtuous way of life, which in turn is achieved when the soul's appetitive part is fixed in a natural state of health. For many, while immersed in passions of body and soul, have rashly ventured to attain this[4] by philosophical training, relying on it alone; but they strayed even from the truth that they did possess, and they destroyed their normal power of [*mental*] vision. For just as the eyes see phantasies in the air because [325]

2. I.e. divine grace.

3. I.e. the sun of God's grace.

* Here a new homily begins in the Syriac.

4. I.e. divine vision.

of the weakness of their vision which is impeded by an opaque fluid in them, so each one of these men considers to be the truth every image that he imagines before him. And when all the images[5] of all these men are brought together into one, then instead of a unity there appear many images in place of the truth. This happens to them because they do not make entreaty for the bright rays of grace that shines through the soul's purification.

Truth is awareness of God which a man savors in himself by means of the perception of the spiritual senses of the mind. The blossoming of spiritual knowledge is divine love, which arises from flaming intellections that are discovered by the spirit during prayer. Love is a fruit of prayer that, by prayer's divine vision, draws the mind insatiably toward that which it[6] longs for when the mind patiently perseveres in prayer without wearying, whether it prays in a visible way, employing the body, or with the silent reflections of the understanding, diligently and with ardor.

Prayer is the mortification of the will's motions pertaining to the life of the flesh. For a man who prays correctly is the equal of the man who is dead to the world. And the meaning of 'to deny oneself' is this: courageously to persevere in prayer.

Those who know the Scriptures, know what the earnest entreaty of correct prayer is; and those who embrace this solitary way of thought so that, by their supplications, they might acquire solitary prayer in proportion to their desire – these know that they must not allow themselves to bring turbulence upon their souls through contrary passions which they might stir up in themselves after prayer. The love of God, therefore, is found in the soul's self-renunciation.

Just as the ear of chastity sprouts from the seed of the sweat of fasting, so satiety yields licentiousness, and repletion yields impurity. But if the belly is starved and humbled, shameful thoughts will never intrude into the soul. Every food that is consumed adds to our body's humors and becomes a natural force within us. When the organic members are filled with the matter that comes from the whole body and a man happens to see something corporeal, or if his heart should suffer an involuntary movement joined with a thought, then the material of pleasure will suddenly be stirred by this and sent throughout

5. I.e. concepts.

6. I.e. love.

the entire body. Even if the mind of a chaste and pure man is strong in all its thoughts, yet his discretion will be immediately shaken by the sensation in his members, and he plunges from the peace where he stood as though from a lofty summit. The holiness of his thoughts is tossed about, and his resplendent chastity is soiled by the turbulence of the passions that entered his heart through the burning of his members. Thereupon he loses one-half of his strength and, one [326] might say, he forgets the former goal of his hope; before he enters the struggle, he is found guilty without struggle, and though his enemies make no effort, he becomes guilty, being subdued by the loose will of his flesh.

The abundant nourishment of continual satiety compels the will of a good man to all these things. Although a man abides safely in the haven of chastity, yet satiety will cause him to stoop to surrender himself to that which he never wished to enter his heart. And when he falls asleep by himself, a congregation of thoughts containing vain and shameful phantasies encompasses him and makes his chaste pallet a brothel and a theater of spectacles. He participates in their conversation through the inebriation of his thoughts and defiles his holy members without drawing near to a woman. What sea is so turbulent and seething with a tempest, as the stable mind that because of the satiety of the belly is stricken with the vehemence of the billows that rise up against it in the sea of a man's flesh?

O chastity, how greatly thy beauty shines, in sleeping on the ground, and in hunger pangs that drive away sleep through the body's hardship, and through abstinence from food which produces a deep moat between the ribs and the belly! All food and all leisure that we indulge in create and give birth to shameful images and unseemly idols, and these come forth and are beheld in the hidden place of our mind, enticing us secretly to take part in shameful deeds. But an empty stomach makes our thinking a desert land, arid and silent from any turbulent thought. The stomach that is filled to satiety is a place of spectacles and an arena of vile phantasies, yea even if we be alone in the desert. For, it is said, satiety desires many things.

When you have been accounted worthy of divine grace and dispassion of soul, you will not understand this from the fact that unseemly thoughts or the movements of thoughts produced by the

body do not pass through your consciousness (for it is impossible to be without these), nor from your easy victory over such thoughts while your thinking remains entirely unsoiled and unshaken, however lofty this state may be, but from the fact that because of a superior activity of the understanding, your mind is not permitted to wage war with unseemly thoughts and crush them; but on the contrary, when thoughts make an appearance, the mind is completely caught away from what pertains to them by a certain violent force which is outside the realm of the will, and which by the effect of habit and grace keeps leaven in the heart, which is the abode of the understanding.

The mind of the ascetic is one thing, the order of the priesthood another. A mind that by the mercy of Heaven has died to the world has only passing thoughts about certain things, and that without battle and struggle. And though there should be struggle due to the motion of the members, this sensation will not be deadly. Perfection that is yoked to flesh and blood has sovereignty over a kingdom constitut-
[327] ed of what springs from flesh and blood. It does not wholly abolish the peculiar properties of nature while a man's vital impulse still throbs with a life originating from the physical elements, and the foundation of his existence is still subject to variation with every movement and fluctuation of the four bodily humors. But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 67

On how the discerning monk ought to dwell in stillness

HEARKEN TO ME, beloved, if you would not have your labors spent in vain and your days lie fallow and be barren of that profit which discerning men hope to find in stillness. Let your entrance into the same be made with discernment, and not simply by tradition, as it is with many; but let there be a goal fixed in your mind, that toward it you may aim the labors of your manner of life. Question the more knowledgeable, who are such by experience and not from erudition. Train yourself in all the wondrous and unencumbered distinctions of stillness, and do not cease until you are practised in all the pathways of the works of stillness. At every step you take, examine whether you are walking on the path or have gone astray on some trail outside it. And never believe that the strict life of stillness is brought to perfection by visible labors alone.

If you wish to find something found by the Fathers and attain to it in your experience, let there be secretly in your soul signs and proofs for you at every step you take, and by these you will know [*whether it is*] the truth of the Fathers or the enemy's delusion. Let these few things which follow be signs to you until you are skilled in your path.

When, in your stillness, you see in your mind that your understanding is able to operate freely in thoughts from the right, and there is no effort for it regarding any of them under its authority, know that your stillness is right.

And again, if, while you are performing your liturgy with discernment and are as far from wandering thoughts as possible, suddenly the verse is cut short from your tongue, and fetters of silence are laid upon your soul without the exercise of her liberty, and these follow upon perseverance [*in stillness*]: then know that you are moving forward in your stillness, and that its simplicity has begun to become manifold within you. For simple stillness,[1] if judged aright, is blame-

1. I.e. unaccompanied by other virtues.

worthy. And simple discipline is counted by those who are philosophic and discerning as a lonely limb, separated from the help of others.

And again, if with each thought moving in your soul, every memory, and the divine visions occurring in your stillness, you observe that your eyes are filled with tears which rain down your cheeks without effort, then know that a breach in the opposing camp has begun to appear before you.

And if you find in yourself that from time to time your mind is plunged inside of you, without any preparation for this outside the order of your usual practice, and it remains there for the better part of an hour, or for whatever it is; and if after these things you see that your limbs seem to be in a state of great debility, while peace reigns over your thoughts, and this same thing always occurs to you: then
Exod. 33:9 know that the cloud has begun to overshadow your tabernacle.

But if, when you spend some time in stillness, you find that thoughts rend your soul and dominate her, and at every moment take possession of her as though by force, and that her mind is led at every opportunity to things that she formerly did, or that she longs to inquire into futile affairs: then know that in vain do you labor in stillness, and that your soul is passing her existence in pointless wandering. The causes of this come to her from outside, or from inward heedlessness regarding her duties, but especially from neglect of vigil and reading. Then immediately set your manner of life in order.

But if, whenever you enter these days, you find no peace from the importunity of the passions, do not marvel. For when the rays of the sun have passed from the bosom of the earth, it retains in itself their warmth for a long time. And when the odor of drugs and the vapor of perfume are diffused through the air, they linger a long while before they are dissipated and vanish. But much more so do the passions. The passions are like dogs accustomed to lick blood in butchers' shops. When these are barred from what their habit feeds on, they stand before the doors and howl until the force of their previous custom is spent.

When heedlessness begins in its thievish way to enter into your soul, and in that gloom she turns herself back, and your house is well
[330] nigh filled with darkness, then you will find these symptoms draw near to you: you secretly feel in yourself that you are weak in your

faith; that you covet visible things; that your confidence wanes; that you are being harmed by your neighbor; that your whole soul is taken up with fault-finding in mouth and heart against every man and every matter – whatever things you encounter in words, in your thoughts, and your senses – and even against the Most High Himself; that you are alarmed at any injury done to your body, through which at every moment cowardice masters you, and from time to time your soul is shaken with fear, so that you are terrorized and oppressed even by your shadow. For you have covered over your faith with unbelief (we do not mean that faith which is the basis of all men's Confession, but the noetic strength that steadies the heart by the light of the understanding, and by the testimony of the conscience rouses in the soul great confidence in God, so that she takes no thought for herself, but having no concern for anything earthly, she casts her cares on God).

But when you are moving forward intelligently, you will find these evident proofs as symptoms in your soul: in all matters you are strengthened in your hope, and you are enriched by prayer; the material of profit is never absent from your mind in everything you meet; you have an awareness of the frailty of human nature; and on the one hand, by these things you are kept from pride, and on the other, your neighbor's faults are set at naught in your eyes; you long for departure from the body by reason of your aspiration for the [*state*] in which we shall live in the age to come; and all the afflictions that befall you openly and in secret you find to be rightly yours, all having descended on you precisely so as to keep you from conceit. And for all these things you will render confession and thanksgiving.

These are signs for those who are vigilant and on their guard, who abide in stillness, and have set their hearts on attaining perfection in their manner of life. But those who are lax have no use for these subtle indications of where falls are lurking in ambush, because they are far from the secret virtues. When one of these starts to penetrate into your soul, at that very moment observe to which side you have begun to incline. For you will immediately know to whose part it belongs. May God grant us true knowledge. Amen.

Homily 68

That we can understand the degree of our manner of life from the changing states of our mind, and that we should not childishly rely on the great diversity of our labors, but as wise men we should recognize the degree of our soul from the secret renewal which we perceive day by day; and on the subtle stage of discernment

ALWAYS PAY HEED TO YOURSELF, beloved, and, as you persevere in your labors, mark the afflictions that come upon you, and the desert in which you pass your life, and the subtlety of your mind, and the keenness of your knowledge, and the great span of your stillness together with the many medicines (i.e. temptations) administered by our true Physician for the health of our inner man. Sometimes, indeed, these are from demons, sometimes they come to pass through sickness and pains of the body, and sometimes through the terror of the thoughts of your soul at dreadful recollections of what will be at the ending of all. But sometimes through the spurring and envelopment[1] of the warmth of grace there arise sweet tears, the joy of the Spirit, and – not to multiply words – the rest.

Do you see with certainty from all these things that your festering sore has begun to heal and close up? This is to say, have your passions begun to grow feeble? Establish proof of it: constantly enter into yourself and mark which of the passions you see have grown feeble in your presence; which of them have perished utterly and have entirely withdrawn; and which of them have begun to grow silent, on the one hand because of the health of your soul and not because of departure from things that incite you, and on the other because your mind has learned to dominate them and not because of the lack of their causes. Give heed, then, and see whether living flesh (which is peace of soul) has begun to come back and completely cover the putrefaction of your sore. And observe: which of your pas-

1. Lit. *bandage, binding round.*

sions consistently and impulsively perturb you, and at what time, and whether they belong to the body or the soul, or are composite and mixed; whether as being feeble they stir dimly in your memory, or rebel vehemently against your soul; whether they do so as exerting authority, or in some stealthy manner; and how your mind, the king, he that wields authority over the senses, attends to them. When they bend their forces and join in war, does the mind make war with them and make them powerless by its might? Or does it not even look upon them with a glance or gauge them? And which of them are remnants of old ones, and which have been newly formed? Further, are your passions set in motion through images, or through sensation without images, and even through remembrances without passion and thoughts, free from arousal? By these things also it is possible to know the degree wherein your soul stands.

If the first state of affairs has free rein and the passions are not confined, this is because strife still presses heavily upon the soul, even though she shows her might against them. But concerning the second the Scripture says in corroboration, 'David sat in his house and God gave him rest from all those round about him.' Do not think these words relate to one of the passions only; rather, together with the natural passions – I mean lust and anger – they also refer to the passions desirous of glory, which depict persons, indulge in phantasy, and wake us to a longing and desire; and again, to the passion of avarice as well. For whenever the soul secretly partakes of it, even if she is not persuaded to commit any overt act, it nevertheless pictures in her mind the idols of the objects of cupidity, taking the amassing of wealth as its theme; and it persuades the soul to meditate upon these things, and creates in her a desire to possess them for herself along with the rest. 2 Kgs. 7:1

Not all the passions wage war by means of assault. For there are passions that only cause the soul affliction. Listlessness, despondency, and grief do not attack, whether by an assault proper, or through relaxation; rather they simply lay a weight upon the soul. The strength of our soul is proved, however, by victory over those passions which wage war by assault. A man must have a refined knowledge of all these, and recognize their symptoms, so that with every step he takes

he may be conscious of the place he has reached, and in what terrain his soul has begun to walk: in the land of Canaan,[2] or beyond the Jordan.

Give heed to this also: is your knowledge, through the illumination of your soul, competent for the discernment of these things, or does it discern them dimly; or is it completely bereft of such capacities? [333] Do you find with absolute certainty that your thoughts have begun to become limpid? Does wandering in your mind take place at the hour of your prayer? And what passion troubles you when your mind draws near to prayer? Do you perceive in yourself that the power of stillness has overshadowed your soul with meekness, calm, and that uncommon peace which it is wont to engender in your mind? Is your understanding, without willing it, continually being rapt away to perceptions of incorporeal things into which our senses are not permitted to search? Does there blaze up within you a sudden joy that completely stills the tongue?

Does a certain sweetness, which by reason of its delightfulness is beyond comparison, constantly well up from your heart and draw the whole man altogether after it? And at times does there imperceptibly descend into the whole body a certain delight and gladness (things which a tongue of flesh cannot express) until whatever is earthly is esteemed ashes and dung when recollected? For the joy first mentioned, which wells up from the heart, appears sometimes at the hour of prayer, sometimes while reading; while at times, again, the mind is made fervent by the constant and prolonged meditation of the understanding. But the joy last mentioned usually comes outside of these, and frequently occurs during our secondary work, and in the same way, often at night, between sleeping and waking, when one is both asleep and not asleep, and awake while not awake. But whenever that delight which surges through his whole body sojourns within a man, at that hour he thinks that nothing else is the Kingdom of the Heavens save this.

See, again, whether your soul has acquired power to strip away the memories of visible things through the power of hope that has gained mastery of the heart, and that strengthens the inner senses through

2. The land of Canaan was the promised land.

unfathomable conviction. And see whether your heart (without taking forethought concerning this) is wont to be led away from earthly things as a prisoner by the continual work of its unceasing converse with our Saviour.

Gain knowledge of the distinction of the heart's calling and its converse when you hear it. Unbroken stillness, by its unceasing and persevering work, quickly makes the soul taste these things. Yet after their discovery they are lost again through the heedlessness of those who have received them, and for a long time are found no more. But with respect to these things one might venture to say (being made bold by the witness of his conscience) what the blessed Paul said when he declared, 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other thing soever, can separate me from the love of Christ.' Yea, neither the tribulations of the body, nor even those of the soul; neither hunger, nor persecution, nor nakedness, nor isolation, nor confinement, nor peril, nor the sword, nor even Satan's angels, nor his powers (through the wicked means of his contrivances), nor glory that fadeth away (through the assault whereby it attacks a man), nor slanders, nor reproofs with blows, inflicted to no purpose and without reason. Rom. 8:38 [334]

But, O my brother, if these things to a greater or lesser extent have not begun to be manifest in your soul after some fashion, then your troubles and afflictions, even all your stillness, is profitless toil. And even if miracles are wrought by your hands, even if you raise the dead, yet such deeds are not to be reckoned as equal to these. At once rouse your soul, and with tears persuade Him Who saves all to draw back the curtain from the door of your heart, to scatter the murk of the passions' storm from your inner sky, and to vouchsafe you to see a ray of daylight, lest you be like one dead, sitting in darkness forever.

Unremitting vigil with reading and frequent prostrations performed intermittently will not be long in conferring these good things on such as are earnest. For those who find them, find them by these means. And those who would find them again, can find them again by these means. When we perform these works and dwell perseveringly in stillness, and our mind is not bound by any thing or any

man, but only by our soul alone, and we practise the work of inner virtue, then by these same works we shall soon find in ourselves a partial, yet distinct, perception of some of these good things, and by it we also receive certainty as regards the rest.

A man who sits in stillness and receives experience of God's kindness has little need of persuasive argument, and his soul is not sick with the disease of unbelief, like those who are doubtful of the truth. For the testimony of his own understanding is sufficient to persuade him above endless words having no experience behind them. To our God be glory and majesty unto the ages. Amen.

Homily 69

On true knowledge, and on temptations, and on how one ought to know clearly that not only certain lesser, weak, and untrained men are tempted, but also those are tempted who have been accounted worthy of dispassion for a time, who have achieved perfection in their manner of thought, and have in part drawn near to the purity that is conjoined with mortification, and have been raised above the passions in so far as this is permitted by God while men are in this world, under the yoke of life conjoined to the passionate flesh: they have a contest, and are vexed with passions because of the flesh, and in [God's] mercy they even suffer abandonment on certain occasions because of the danger of pride

HOW OFTEN [*even men of advanced virtue*] transgress, and through repentance heal their souls, and grace accepts them! For aberration passes without distinction through every rational nature, and at every hour variations pass over all men; the discerning man will find many occasions to understand this. But above all, it is the trials that daily befall a man that are able to make him wise concerning these things, if he is vigilant. Thus he can observe himself with his understanding and learn how great an alteration of meekness and gentleness his mind admits every day, how it suddenly turns away from its peaceful disposition into turbid confusion without any immediate cause, and how it enters into great and unspeakable danger.

Saint Macarius has written most clearly with much forethought and earnestness as a reminder and an instruction for the brethren. He wrote so that those who have reached the level of purity should not fall into despair at the time of contrary variations, when accidental falls happen to them (as it occurs that the air grows cold at times) even without their being negligent or lax; for even though they are observing right discipline, downfalls occur which are opposed to their will's aim. But the blessed Mark also testifies concerning this as

one who speaks from exact experience, and he puts this down in his writings for greater confirmation, as it were, lest any man should think that Saint Macarius wrote this in his letter simply by chance, and not from genuine experience; and also so that by reason of two such witnesses as these, the mind may accept undoubtingly its consolation at the time of need. What then does he write? 'Changes occur in every man,' he says, 'even as they do in the atmosphere.'[1] Understand his words 'in every man,' for our nature is one, and do not therefore suppose that he said this about inferior and lesser men only, while the perfect are liberated from change and abide in one state unwaveringly, never having passionate thoughts, as the Euchites[2] assert. For this reason, therefore, he wrote, 'in every man.'

How is this, O Macarius? You say that 'there is cold, and soon after, burning heat, and then perhaps even hail, and after a little, fair weather. This is the manner in which we are trained: now there is warfare, now grace comes to our aid; sometimes the soul is found in a tempest and violent waves rise up against her, and then a change occurs, grace overshadows a man and fills his heart with joy and peace from God, and chaste and tranquil thoughts.'[1]

He mentions here chaste thoughts alluding to the fact that beforehand there were bestial and impure thoughts in us. Then he admonishes us, saying: 'If it should happen that after we receive those chaste and gentle thoughts, we should suffer an assault, let us not be sorrowful and despair. And likewise, let us not boast during a period of grace-given rest, but rather, in the time of joy let us expect affliction.'

When he says that we should not be sorrowful if falls occur, he does not mean that we should not stand up against them and that our mind should accept them gladly as being natural to us and our own, but that we should not despair like a man who was expecting something more exalted than struggle, and a perfect and unchanging repose; and who, moreover, will accept neither struggles nor sorrows, nor to experience in himself any movement that is opposed to this perfect state, which [*freedom*] God does not think it fit to grant to our

1. A quotation from the First Syriac Epistle of St. Macarius of Alexandria, also called the Twelfth Syriac Epistle of St. Macarius of Egypt. See Appendix B for the complete text of this epistle, and p. 109 of the Introduction for an explanation.

2. Heretics also known as the Messalians or 'praying people.'

nature in this world. God has done so, lest we should cease from works entirely and, in such a state of mind, should languish in despair [337] and remain motionless in our course.

Further he writes: 'Know that all the saints were engaged in this work. As long as we are in the world we secretly receive abundant consolation together with this labor.' Every day and every hour the proof of our love for God is demanded of us through warfare and struggle against temptations. And this is the meaning of 'We should not be sorrowful': that we should not grow despondent in the struggle. 'In this manner,' he says, 'our path is made smooth. But the man who desires to run aside or deviate from these things will be prey for wolves.'

Truly marvellous is this holy man, how by a few words he made this expression worthy of confidence, showed it to be full of wisdom, and completely expelled every doubt from the mind of his reader! Furthermore he says that because a man according to his own set intention does not wish to journey in the way, and desires instead to go in his own path, one not trodden by the Fathers, he turns aside from these things and becomes prey for the wolves. And he also teaches us to await afflictions in the hour of gladness. When by the inworking of grace there suddenly arise within us great thoughts and astonishment at the mind's divine visions, which are more lofty than nature, and when (as Saint Mark says) the holy angels draw nigh to us, filling us with spiritual vision, then all things that oppose us retreat and there is peace and ineffable tranquillity for as long a time as we remain in these things.

When, therefore, grace overshadows you and the holy angels draw nigh to you and encompass you, and moreover all those who tempt you withdraw from your proximity, do not be uplifted and think within your soul that you have now attained to the tempest-free harbor and the air that is unchanging. Do not think that you have been exalted above the gulf [*of this world*], and the contrary winds that blow therein, and that there is no more enemy, nor encounter with evil. For there are many who have thought this and have fallen into perils, as the blessed Nilus has written. Again, do not think that you have become greater than many, and that justly, forsooth, it belongs to you to abide in such sublime things, but that it does not belong to

them at all because of their imperfect manner of life, or because (one says) their knowledge is insufficient and so they are deprived of these things, while I abide in what is proper to me since I have attained to perfect holiness, and the spiritual level, and unchanging joy.

But on the contrary, think upon the unclean thoughts and the obscene idols that were fixed fast in your mind during the time of tempest, in the hour when your thoughts were shaken and unruly as they rose up against you in the blindness of the black night. Ponder upon how speedily you turned toward the passions and conversed with them in the murky confusion of your mind, and were not ashamed, nor were you truly awed by the vision of divine things and the graces and gifts which you had received. Know, therefore, that in order to
[338] humble us divine providence, which with foreknowledge provides and cares for each one of us, brought upon us all these things. For if you become puffed up by her gifts, she will abandon you, and you will fall into deeds which by their mere thought alone throw you into temptation.

Know with certainty, therefore, that to stand is not within your power, nor does it pertain to your virtue, but it belongs to grace herself which carries you upon the palm of her hand, that you might not be alarmed. Ponder on these things in yourself when you are joyful, writes our holy Father, and whenever your thought should be uplifted, weep and lament, and cast yourself headlong upon the recollection of the transgressions which you committed by God's permission, that you may be delivered by this and acquire humility from these things. Nonetheless, do not despair; but in thoughts proper to humility find forgiveness for your sins.

Humility, even without works, gains forgiveness for many offenses; but without her, works are of no profit to us, and rather prepare for us great evils. Therefore, through humility, as I said, find forgiveness for your iniquitous deeds. What salt is to any food, humility is to every virtue, and she can crush the strength of many sins. To acquire humility we must be unceasingly grieved in our mind through self-belittlement and discerning sorrow. And if she becomes ours, she will make us sons of God, and even without good works she will present us to God. For without humility all our works are in vain, every virtue and every righteous labor.

God wishes the alteration of our mind, for by the mind we improve and by the mind we become unprofitable. For it is sufficient in itself to stand alone before God unaided and to speak in our behalf. Give thanks and praise God unceasingly that, although you possess a nature which is weak and easily drawn away, yet by the assistance of grace, you are exalted from time to time, you receive great gifts, and are raised far above nature. But when it is permitted, see how far you plunge, and how you acquire a brutish mind. Remember the wretchedness of your nature, and how swiftly a change can occur within you, even as one of the holy elders said: 'Whenever a proud thought comes to you saying, "Remember your virtues," then answer, "Old man, behold your fornication!"'[3] Here he speaks of the fornication that tempts you in your thoughts when God so permits, because grace provides for each of us what is profitable, either warfare or succor.

Do you see how simply this marvellous elder expresses the matter? Whenever, he says, a proud thought comes to you concerning the excellence of your discipline, say: Old man, behold your fornication. It is obvious that the elder said this to a great man, since men cannot be troubled by the thought of pride unless they are found in the higher levels and their manner of life is truly praiseworthy. For [339] this passion rises up against the soul after virtue has been practised, in order to strip her of the activity of virtue. You can also learn, if you wish, from a letter of the same Saint Macarius what level the saints achieved and what things God permits to assail them in order to try them. Here is that epistle: *Abba Macarius writes to all his beloved children.*[4]

Abba Macarius clearly teaches them how God provides for them both in conflicts and in the succor of grace. For it pleased the wisdom of God to train the saints, for as long as they are in this life, by their struggle against sin for virtue's sake, so that their gaze might always be raised toward God and that by their continual beholding of Him

3. Abba Epiphanius. Budge, *PHF*, Vol. II, p. 28, #123.

4. Apparently St. Isaac included the entire epistle of St. Macarius, but it was left out in later manuscripts, both Syriac and Greek. The words *Abba Macarius writes to his beloved children* are the first words of the First Syriac Epistle of St. Macarius of Egypt. See Appendix B for the entire text of this epistle.

their holy love for Him might grow. When they run unceasingly to Him because of the urgency of the passions and the fear of aberration, they are made steadfast in faith, hope, and love of Him.

Clearly these things were not written for those who dwell with men and go about everywhere, and are always engaged in actions and thoughts that are shameful and unclean. Nor are they for those who remain outside of stillness and practise righteousness with works, who are captivated by their senses at every hour and are constantly in danger of falling (for necessity, which confronts them against their will, throws them into involuntary circumstances), and who are unable perfectly to guard not only their thoughts, but their senses also.

These things are meant, rather, for men who with great vigilance endeavor to keep watch over their body and their thinking; who withdraw completely from turmoil and intercourse with men; who pass their time in keeping their mind in prayer by their renunciation of all things and even of their souls; who accept in perfect stillness the changing states dispensed by grace; who pass their lives under the arm of the knowledge of the Lord; and who in stillness are secretly made wise by the Spirit, being separated from all things and the sight of them, and possessing a mind that is dead to the world. The passions do not die due to such things, but it is the mind that dies to the passions by a man's separation from things and by the assistance of grace. May grace keep us also within this measure. Amen.

Homily 70

The concise sense of [the previous] chapter, with the significance of the things that were said; and on prayer

THE CONCISE SENSE of [*the previous*] chapter is the following: at every moment we should know that we stand in need of repentance throughout the twenty-four hours of the night and day. The meaning of the word *repentance,* as we have learned from the true means of its performance, is this: continual and intense supplication which by means of prayer filled with compunction draws nigh to God in order to seek forgiveness of past offenses, and entreaty for preservation from future ones.

For this reason our Lord fortified our infirmity by prayer, saying, 'Awake, watch, and pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Pray and be not slothful, being watchful and praying always. 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' Matt. 26:41 Matt. 7:7–8

He strongly corroborates His word and induces us to become the more zealous by the parable of the friend who went to his friend in the middle of the night and asked him for bread, and He says, 'Verily I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.' Pray ye also, therefore, and be not negligent. Luke 11:8

O the ineffable encouragement! The Giver incites us to entreat Him, to the end that He might give us His divine gifts. And although the Lord, as He Himself knows, provides us with everything that will profit us, nonetheless what He here says is filled with great power to give us courage and to make us confident.

For He knows that until our death He does not take away from us the capacity of going astray, and how close this change is to us (that is, from virtue to vice), and that human nature itself is susceptible to contrary states. For these very reasons He enjoins us to be zealous

and to struggle in continuous prayer. If the state of certainty were to be found in this world and, having attained it, a man's nature were raised above every necessity and his labor above fear, then the Lord would not have enjoined us and, in His care for us, exhorted us to struggle in prayer. In the future age the saints will not offer prayers to God as petitions for something. For in that fatherland of freedom our nature will not be susceptible to changes, nor to submission to the fear of adversities, because it will be perfect in every way.

Therefore the Lord does not urge us only to prayer and vigilance, but His providence often hurls us into the realm of temptations due to the subtlety and incomprehensibility of those things that continually confront us, which the knowledge of our mind cannot comprehend, and in which we are often found against our will even though our understanding be very firm and cleave to the good. Thus the blessed Paul said: 'Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in
2 Cor. 12:7–9 weakness.'

'Wherefore, O Lord (so speaks Paul), I rejoice, if this be Thy will, and our childishness requires all these things to be instructed, trained, and awakened by Thee, even when a man is drunk with fervent love for Thee, as am I, and is drawn after good things, not seeing the world at all because of the inebriation of the love that he has for Thee. Thou hast granted me to attain to this, even to revelations and divine visions which the tongue of flesh cannot express, and to see and hear the voice of the liturgy of spiritual beings, and to be deemed worthy of the vision of Thee, a thing replete with holiness. But despite all these, I have not the power to guard myself, I who am a man that is perfect in Christ, because there remains something yet, which by reason of its subtlety I am unable to comprehend, I who
1 Cor. 2:16 possess the mind of Christ.

'Hence, O Lord, I rejoice in infirmities, in tribulations, in prisons, in bonds, in necessities: whether they be from nature, or from the sons of nature, or from the enemies of nature. Joyfully I now endure in mine infirmities, that is, in my temptations, so that the power of

God may overshadow me. If, with all these, I still require the rod of temptations, that Thine indwelling may be thereby increased within me, and that I may be protected by Thy nearness to me, then I know that there is no man whom Thou lovest as me. 2 Cor. 12:9–10 [342]

'Therefore Thou hast magnified me above many. Thou hast granted to none of my fellow apostles so to know Thy wondrous and glorious powers as Thou hast to me, and a chosen vessel Thou hast called me, as one who is faithful in keeping the rule of Thy love. Because of all these things, and especially because the work of preaching progresses and goes forward, more than if I were freed from the bond of temptations, I know that if it were profitable for me, Thou wouldst have given me freedom; but it is not Thy pleasure that I should be without tribulation and care in this world. As many times as I have suffered trials, Thy concern was not so much that the work of preaching Thy Gospel should multiply in the world, but that I should be profited by temptations, while my soul was being kept sound by Thee.' Acts 9:15

So, O man of discretion, if all this be true, great is the profit of trials! For however much a man in the likeness of Paul is raised aloft and enters into the spiritual state, he still stands in need of fear and watchfulness, and he reaps great profit from temptations. Show me the man who has reached the state of certainty in this mortal world that is full of despoilers, who has received that portion wherein there is no aberration (which even the holy angels have not been given, 'that they without us should not be made perfect'), who wishes to be completely immutable even before all spiritual and physical beings, and that no temptation should approach him in his thoughts! Heb. 11:40

But the knowledge of this world's order as expressed in all the Scriptures is this: if each day recurringly we should receive a thousand wounds, we should not become faint-hearted and abandon our course in the arena. For it is possible through one small opportunity to seize the victory and to win our crown.

This world is the course of the contest and the arena of the courses. This time is the time of combat; and there is no law laid down in the field of combat and in the time of contest. That is to say, the King lays no limit on His warriors until the contest is finished and all men are brought to the gate of the King of kings, where each is examined

whether he persevered in the contest and refused to admit defeat, or turned his back. For it oftentimes happens that a man who is altogether useless, who, because of his lack of training, is constantly pierced and thrown down, who is feeble at all times, suddenly seizes the banner from the hands of the mighty warriors, the sons of the giants, and makes his name famous. He thus gains greater renown than those who always contend and are known for their victories, and he re-
[343] ceives a crown and gifts esteemed precious by all his companions. For this reason no man should despair; only, let us not be negligent in prayer, nor be slothful to beseech the Lord for succor.

And let us fix this also in our minds: that so long as we are in this world and left in this flesh, even though we be exalted to the vault of heaven, we cannot be without labors and hardship and free from care. This is the end of it; forgive me. More than this is speculation devoid of sense. To our God be glory, dominion, and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homily 71

On the difference of the virtues, on the end of the entire course, and on the greatness of love for mankind which in a spiritual manner perfects all the saints, and firmly plants the divine likeness in them through God's abundant love, which He has poured out upon the race of the sons of men

THE END of the entire course consists in these three things: in repentance, in purity, and in perfection. What is repentance? It is the abandoning of former deeds and grieving over them. What, succinctly, is purity? It is a heart that shows mercy to all created nature. And what is perfection? It is profound humility, which is the abandoning of everything visible and invisible: by visible [*I mean that one abandons*] all things perceived by the senses, and by invisible [*I mean that one abandons*] all thought concerning them.

Once an elder was asked, 'What is repentance?' And he replied, 'Repentance is a contrite and humble heart.' 'And what is humility?' 'It is a twofold voluntary death to all things.' 'And what is a merciful heart?' 'It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and at the recollection and sight of them, the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy that grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up prayers with tears continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles, because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God.'

Again he was asked, 'What is prayer?' And he replied: 'The mind's freedom and rest from everything of this world, and a heart that has completely turned its gaze toward the fervent desire belong-

ing to the hope of future things. But the man who has no part of these things sows a mixed seed in his sowing, and is like a man who yokes an ox and an ass together.'

Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9, 10

Again he was asked, 'How can a man acquire humility?' And he said: 'By unceasing remembrance of transgressions; by expectation of approaching death; by inexpensive clothing; by always preferring the last place; by always running to do the tasks that are the most insignificant and disdainful; by not being disobedient; by unceasing silence; by dislike of gatherings; by desiring to be unknown and of no account; by never possessing anything at all through self-will; by shunning conversation with numerous persons; by having no love of material gain; and after these things, by raising the mind above the reproach and accusation of every man and above zealotry;[1] by not being one whose hand is against every man, and against whom is every man's hand,[2] but rather one who remains alone, occupied with his own affairs; by having no concern for anyone in the world save himself. But in brief: exile, poverty, and a solitary life give birth to humility and cleanse the heart.'

The sign of those who have attained to perfection is this: if, for the sake of his love for men, a man were to be given over to the fire ten times a day, he would not be content with this, even as Moses said to God, 'If now Thou wilt forgive their sin, forgive it; and if not, blot me out of Thy book which Thou hast written'; and like the blessed Paul who said, 'For I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren'; and again, 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for the nations.' And likewise the other apostles accepted many kinds of death because of their fervent desire that men should receive life.

Exod. 32:32

Rom. 9:3

Col. 1:24

But the sum of all is that God the Lord surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son over to death for its sake.' This was not, however, because He could not have redeemed us in another way, but so that His surpassing love, manifested hereby, might be a teacher unto us. And by the death of His only-begotten Son He made us near to Himself. Yea, if He had had anything more precious, He would have given it to us, so that by it our race might be His own. Because of His great love for us it was not His

John 3:16

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1. See Homily 51. This could also mean *above envy.* 2. Ishmael. See Gen. 16:12.

pleasure to do violence to our freedom (although He is able to do so), but He chose that we should draw near to Him by the love of our understanding. For the sake of His love for us, and in obedience to His Father, Christ joyfully took upon Himself insult and sorrow, as Scripture says, 'For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross, despising the shame.' For this same reason the Lord said on the night in which He was betrayed, 'This is My body which is given for the world for life, and this is My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' And again He said for our sakes, 'I sanctify Myself.'

Heb. 12:2

Matt. 26:26, 28

John 17:19

In like manner, when the saints become perfect, they all attain to this perfection, and by the superabundant outpouring of their love and compassion upon all men they resemble God. The saints seek for themselves this sign of complete likeness to God: to be perfect in the love of their neighbor. The monastic fathers did likewise, when they strove to bear always in themselves that perfection and likeness (so full of life) of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is said that the blessed Anthony never resolved within himself to do anything that would benefit himself more than his neighbor, because he possessed the hope that his neighbor's profit would be to him his own most excellent work.[3]

Furthermore it is said concerning Abba Agatho that he was wont to say, 'I should wish to find a leper to take his body and give him mine own.' Do you see perfect love? Even in outward things he could not bear not to give rest to his neighbor. He possessed a knife and once a brother came to him and took a liking to it, and the saint would not allow him to leave his cell without it.[4] And there are many other such things written about these men.

But why do I speak of this? Many of them surrendered their bodies to wild beasts, to the sword, and to fire for their neighbor. No one can ascend to this degree of love unless he secretly perceives his hope.

3. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 93, #404.

4. Ibid., p. 99, #426 and #425. For 'I should wish to find a *leper,*' Budge has '*an Arian*'; the two words in Syriac are identical except for a single short vowel. Likewise in Budge, Vol. I, p. 192, ch. lxvii, *The Triumph of the Blessed Man Eulogius, who ministered unto the* Arian, *whose Body was destroyed for the sake of Christ* ought rather to be *The Triumph of the Blessed Man Eulogius, who for the sake of Christ ministered unto the* Leper, *whose Body was destroyed.*

And those who love this world cannot acquire love for men. When a man acquires this love, together with it he is clad with God Himself. He who has put on God, however, must not only refuse to gain anything else besides Him, but must also strip off his own body. But if a man is clothed with the world or with love of this life, he will in no wise be clothed with God until he abandons all. For He Himself bears witness to this, saying, 'If a man abandon not all and hate his own life
Luke 14:26 also, he cannot be My disciple.' He must not only abandon all things, but he must also hate them. But if a man cannot be His disciple, how will He dwell in him?

Question Why is hope so sweet, her discipline and her labors so light, and her works so easy for the soul?

Answer Because hope awakens a natural longing in the soul and
[347] gives men this cup to drink, straightway making them drunk. Thenceforth they no longer feel the wearisome toil, but become insensible to afflictions, and throughout the whole course of their journey they think that they walk on air, and do not tread the path with human footsteps; for they see not the harshness of the way, no mountains or rivers bar their path, and 'the rough places shall become smooth ways
Isa. 40:4 for them,' and so on, because they fix their attention on the bosom of their Father.

Things that lie afar off and are invisible, this hope ever shows them clearly, as it were the very things themselves, so that they might examine them in an enigma with the hidden eye of faith. And they reckon things far off as near because all the parts of their soul are set aflame, as with fire, in their longing for what lies afar off. So it is thither that the whole span of their thoughts is directed, and they speed ever onward to know when they will attain this.

When they approach a virtue to practise it, they do not practise it separately, but all the virtues at once, completely and comprehensively. For they do not make their journey upon the royal highway as other men, but these giants select for themselves short-cuts, whereby gloriously they journey swiftly to the Heavenly mansions. For this hope so inflames them, as with fire, that they cannot rest from their incessant and headlong course on account of their joy. There comes to pass in them what was spoken by the blessed Jeremias, 'I said, I shall not remember Him nor speak His Name. And there was in my

heart as it were a flaming fire and it entered into my bones.' Such is recollection of God in the hearts of men who are drunk with hope on His promises. Jer. 20:9

I call the short-cuts among the virtues the all-embracing virtues, because they are not of great length owing to manifold pathways of a discipline leading from here to there; they do not await a time and place and they accept no distraction, but straightway they make their stand and accomplish the virtues.

Question What is human dispassion?

Answer Dispassion does not mean that a man feels no passions, but that he does not accept any of them. Owing to the many and various virtues, both evident and hidden, acquired by the saints, the passions have grown feeble in them and cannot easily rise up against their soul. Nor does the mind need to keep constant watch on them, because in its thoughts it is filled at all times with study and intercourse with most excellent subjects, which are stirred in the understanding by the activity of insight. As soon as the passions begin to arise, the mind is suddenly ravished away from them by a certain insight that penetrates into the understanding, and the passions recede from it as being inactive.

The mind that accomplishes the works of virtue by God's grace and has drawn nigh to knowledge, as the blessed Mark said, is conscious of little that comes from the wicked and senseless part of the [348] soul. For its knowledge ravishes it on high and estranges the mind from all that is in the world. And because of the purity which the saints possess, their mind becomes subtle, nimble, and keen. And further, because of their ascetical life, their mind is purified and becomes perfectly clear because their flesh has dried up. In consequence of their practice of stillness and their long continuance therein, their mind swiftly alights wherever the divine vision within them draws it, leading it to awestruck wonder at the same. Therefore their divine visions bounteously multiply and their mind is never in want of the substance of insight, nor are they ever without those things which the fruit of the Spirit produces in them. Prolonged and habitual discipline utterly blots out from the heart the recollections that set the passions and the powerful sway of the devil in motion in the soul. For when the soul does not keep lewd company with the passions by de-

liberating upon them, then, since she is constantly held fast by another concern, the power of the passions can no longer hold her spiritual senses in its claws.

Question What are the special characteristics of humility?

Answer Just as presumption dissipates the soul through imaginings that distract her, and gives her free rein to fly among the clouds of her thoughts and to circle round all creation, so humility collects the soul through the stillness of the thoughts and concentrates her within herself. As the soul is unknown and invisible to corporeal eyes, so a humble man remains unknown amid men. As the soul abiding within the body is hidden from the sight and association with all men, so the truly humble man not only does not wish to be seen or known by men (for which reason he is secluded and distant from all men), but more, his will is – if possible – to plunge himself away from himself into himself. He wishes to enter and dwell in stillness, to forsake his former conceptions completely, together with his senses, and to become as something that does not exist in creation, that has not come into being in this world, that is utterly unknown even to his soul and his senses. And so long as such a man is hidden, locked away and withdrawn from the world, he remains wholly with his Lord.

A humble man is never pleased to see gatherings, confused crowds, tumult, shouts and cries, opulence, adornment, and luxury, the cause of insobriety; nor does he take pleasure in conversations, assemblies, noise, and the scattering of the senses; but above all he chooses to be by himself and to collect himself within himself, being alone in stillness, separated from all creation, and taking heed to himself in a silent place. Insignificance, absence of possessions, want and poverty are in every wise beloved by him. He is not engaged in manifold and
[349] fluctuating affairs, but at all times he desires to be unoccupied and free of the cares and the confusion of the things of this world, that he may keep his thoughts from going outside himself.

For he is persuaded that if he becomes involved with many activities, it will not be possible for him to remain without confused and disturbed thoughts. For many activities collect many cares and a swarm of diverse and complicated thoughts. These cause a man to leave the peacefulness of his thoughts (whereby he was superior to all earthly cares, except for the small necessities of life that are in-

evitable), and a state of mind that has a single concern amid peaceful reflections. And when necessities do not permit him to restrain his mouth from speaking, he is both harmed and causes harm. Then the door is thrown open to the passions, the tranquillity of discernment retires, humility flees, and the door to peace is shut. For all these reasons a humble man unceasingly protects himself from many affairs, and thus at all times he is found to be tranquil, gentle, peaceful, modest, and reverent.

A humble man is never rash, hasty, or perturbed, never has any hot and volatile thoughts, but at all times remains calm. Even if heaven were to fall and cleave to the earth, the humble man would not be dismayed. Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet. There is no humble man who is not self-constrained; but you will find many who are self-constrained without being humble. This is also what the meek and humble Lord meant when He said, 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' For the humble man is always at rest, because there is nothing that can agitate or shake his mind. Just as no one can frighten a mountain, so the mind of a humble man cannot be frightened. If it be permissible and not incongruous, I should say that the humble man is not of this world. For he is not troubled and altered by sorrows, nor amazed and carried away by joys, but all his gladness and his real rejoicing are in the things of his Master. Matt. 11:29

Humility is accompanied by modesty and self-collectedness: that is, chastity of the senses; a moderated voice; mean speech; self-belittlement; poor raiment; a gait that is not pompous; a gaze directed toward the earth; superabundant mercy; easily flowing tears; a solitary soul; a contrite heart; imperturbability to anger; undistracted senses; few possessions; moderation in every need; endurance; patience; fearlessness; manliness of heart born of a hatred for this temporal life; patient endurance of trials; deliberations that are weighty, not light; extinction of thoughts; guarding of the mysteries of chastity; modesty; reverence; and above all, continually to be still and always to claim ignorance.

The humble man never encounters a necessity that could trouble and confuse him. When he is alone, he even feels shame before himself. I should marvel greatly if there were any truly humble man who [350]

would venture to supplicate God when he draws nigh to prayer, or to ask to be accounted worthy of prayer, or to make entreaty for any other thing, or who would know what to pray. For the humble man keeps a reign of silence over all his deliberations, and simply awaits mercy and whatever decree should come forth concerning him from the countenance of God's worshipful majesty. When he bows his face to the earth, and the divine vision within his heart is raised to the sublime gate leading to the Holy of Holies, wherein is He Whose dwelling-place is darkness that dims the eyes of the Seraphim and Whose brilliance awes the legions of their choirs and sheds silence upon all their orders, and when they are waiting for mysteries to shine forth from the Invisible One in that airless realm through a soundless motion, through bodiless senses, through imageless perception of that formless Essence and of revelations which surpass them, the power of their thoughts being too weak to contain the waves of those mysteries: then he dares only to speak and pray thus, 'May it be unto me according to Thy will, O Lord.' And may we also say the same for ourselves. Amen.

3 Kgs. 8:12, 54

Thus far I have endeavored to set down for you in simple words things that the understanding can grasp without scrutiny on account of their manifest sense, things from the reading of which alone the mind forgets the customs and courses of this world and its carnal mode of life, and is straightway translated in understanding to that true and better world. I beseech your love, that when you light upon these mysteries, do not leave them without gaining profit, lest they be found to be mere dead words to you, and it should befall you what befell those who were invited to that spiritual banquet but excused themselves from entering in. Behold, the table is prepared, the spiritual delicacies are laid out, and lo, all delightful things are furnished; the Bridegroom awaits us, that we should enter and rejoice with Him. Let us, therefore, not excuse ourselves, lest that word also be said to us that was said concerning them. What word? 'Amen, I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper.'

Luke 14:24

Homily 72

On faith and humility

O MISERABLE MAN, do you wish to find life? Hold faith and humility fast within you; for through them you will find mercy, help, and words spoken by God in the heart, along with a protector who stands beside you both secretly and manifestly. Do you wish to obtain these things, which are a fountain of life? From the very outset take hold of simplicity. Walk before God in simplicity and not with knowledge. Simplicity is attended by faith; but subtle and intricate deliberations, by conceit; and conceit is attended by separation from God.

When you fall down before God in prayer, become in your thought like an ant, like the creeping things of the earth, like a leech, and like a tiny lisping child. Do not say anything before Him with knowledge, but with a child's manner of thought draw near God and walk before Him, that you may be counted worthy of that paternal providence which fathers have for their small children. It has been said, 'The Lord preserveth the infants.' An infant goes up to a snake Ps. 114:6
and clasps it by the neck, and it does him no harm. An infant goes naked all winter long, when everyone else is dressed and covered up, and the cold steals over all his limbs unfelt. He sits naked on a day of cold, ice, and frost and suffers nothing, because the body of his innocency is swaddled with another, invisible garment woven of that hidden providence which protects his tender limbs, lest harm from any source come near them.

Now do you believe that there is a certain hidden providence by which a tender body, especially subject to every hurt because of the delicacy and weakness of its constitution, is protected amid hostile forces, and is not overcome by them? David says, 'The Lord preserveth the infants.' And not only those who are tiny of body, but also those who, being wise in the world, abandon their knowledge, and applying themselves entirely to that other, all-sufficing wisdom, and

becoming like babes of their own free will, learn that other wisdom, which is not learned through the exertions of study.

Well did Paul say, who was wise in things divine, 'He that seemeth
1 Cor. 3:18 to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.' But ask God to grant that you attain to the measure of faith. And if you experience the delight of faith in your soul, it is not difficult for me to say to you that there is nothing further that keeps you from Christ. It is not hard for you to be carried off at every moment from earthly things and forget this futile and feeble world and memories of its affairs. Pray for this diligently, and entreat for it with fervor, and with great earnestness make supplication till you receive it. Then you will weary yourself no longer. You will be counted worthy of these things if with faith you first compel yourself to cast your care upon God, and exchange your own providing for His providence.

When He sees your volition, that with complete limpid purity of thought you have put your faith in God alone, rather than in yourself, and that you compel yourself to hope in God more than in your own soul, then power which is unknown to you will come to rest upon you, and you will sensibly perceive this very power which is with you beyond any doubt. Many, on becoming aware of this power, enter into fire and have no fear, and while they walk on water do not falter in their thoughts, considering how perhaps they may be drowned. For faith strengthens the senses of the soul, and a man perceives, as it were, one unseen, who persuades him not to heed the sight of terrible things, save only with that vision which surpasses the senses.

Take care, lest you think in any wise that a man receives that other, spiritual knowledge through this merely human[1] knowledge of ours. But I say that not only is it impossible for that other, spiritual knowl-

1. Gk. ψυχικός. Lit. *pertaining to the soul, soulish*. It is translated by the word *natural* in the Authorized Version (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). English has no suitable equivalent for this term. The sense, as it is used here, is given by the following quotations which explain St. Paul's usage in First Corinthians: 'The man who is *psychikos* is he who lives according to the flesh and whose mind is not yet illumined by the Spirit; he possesses only that innate human insight which the Creator has placed in the souls of all men' (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary On First Corinthians* [*PG* 74.865B]). 'The Apostle calls *psychikos* the man who is satisfied with his own thoughts alone, who does not accept the teaching of the Spirit, and is not even able to understand it' (Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Commentary On First Corinthians* [*PG* 82.245A]). In this sense *psychikos* can be translated *carnal, unspiritual, profane, material-minded*.

edge to be received by this merely human knowledge, but not even an inkling of it can be perceived by those who are zealous to train themselves in such knowledge. And if any of these men should wish to approach the knowledge of the spirit, then until they repudiate human knowledge, all the intricacies of its subtlety, and all the convolutions of its method, and establish themselves in a childlike manner of thought, they will not be able to draw near to it, not even by ever so little. Even the customary employment of human knowledge and its notions are a great hindrance to these men, until little by little they erase these things [*from their minds*]. This spiritual knowledge is simple and does not shine upon human conceptions. Until our mind has been freed from its many conceptions and enters the unified simplicity of purity, it can never experience spiritual knowledge. [353]

This order of knowledge is the experiencing of delight that belongs to the life of that other age. Hence it holds multiple deliberations in contempt. But human knowledge cannot know anything else except a multiplicity of deliberations. It cannot know that which is received in the simplicity of the mind, according to Him Who says, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.' But lo, the majority of men do not attain such innocency, yet we hope that for their good deeds a portion is reserved for them in the Kingdom of the Heavens. This can be ascertained from the understanding of the Beatitudes of the Gospel, which He stated differently in order to make known to us the many variations in the diverse modes of life within these same Beatitudes. For in all the measures of every way upon which each man journeys to Him, God opens before him the gate of the Kingdom of the Heavens. Matt. 18:3

A man cannot receive spiritual knowledge except he be converted, and become as a little child. For only then does he experience that delight which belongs to the Kingdom of the Heavens. By 'Kingdom of the Heavens' the Scriptures mean spiritual divine vision. This cannot be found through the workings of our deliberations, but by grace it can be tasted. Until a man has been purified, he is not even capable of hearing of it, for no one is able to acquire it by instruction. If, my son, you reach the purity of heart which comes of faith (a purity which is gathered in stillness, away from men), and you forget the knowledge of this world so that you are not even conscious of it, suddenly that

other, spiritual knowledge will be found within you without your
Gen. 28:18 searching for it. 'Set up a pillar,' Scripture says, 'and pour oil upon it,' and thou shalt find treasure in thy bosom.

But if you are caught fast in the noose of human knowledge, it is not improper for me to say that it would be easier for you to be loosed from fetters of iron than from this. You will never be far from the snares and bonds of delusion, nor will you ever be able to have boldness and confidence before the Lord; at every moment you will walk
[354] the edge of a sword, and by no means will you be able to escape sorrow. Take refuge in weakness and simplicity, that you may live acceptably before God and be without care. For just as a shadow follows a body, so also does mercy follow humility. If, then, you wish to pass your life in these things, by no means encourage your feeble deliberations. Even if all ills and evils and dangers should surround and frighten you, give no heed to them, neither take them into account.

If once you have set your faith in the Lord Who is Himself sufficient for your protection and your care, and if you are following after Him, take no thought again for any such thing, but say to your soul: 'He suffices me for all, to Whom I have altogether committed myself. I am not here;[2] He knows this.' And then you will see in reality the wonders of God, how on every occasion He is at hand to deliver those who fear Him, and how His providence encompasses them and is not observed. Although the guardian [*angel*] who accompanies you is not observed with bodily eyes, you should have no doubt of his existence. For there are also times when he reveals himself even to your bodily eyes to give you courage.

As soon as a man casts all visible aid and mortal hope away from himself, and follows after God with faith and a limpidly pure heart, grace immediately attends him, and reveals her power to him in help of many kinds. First, in things that are manifest, and in what pertains to the body, she shows him her succor by making provision for him, since he is more able to perceive in these things the power of God's providence concerning himself. And through his understanding of things manifest, he is also convinced of those things that are hidden (for so the childishness of his thinking and his inexperience demand), seeing that his need is toillessly fulfilled when he did not so much as give it a thought. While he does not concern himself with them, she

2. I.e. absent to all earthly concerns.

causes many onslaughts, often filled with dangers, to pass him by as they approach him, and by a great miracle grace imperceptibly dispels them, watching over him like a mother hen which spreads out her wings over her brood, lest any harm come near them. And she shows him before his very eyes how his destruction was upon him, and he remained unhurt.

In the same manner she trains him in hidden things as well, and discloses before him the ambush of thoughts and deliberations which are hard to grapple with and difficult to comprehend. The understanding of them is readily uncovered by him: their inter-relatedness, their deceit, which of them follows which, and how they breed, one thought from another, and destroy the soul. Right before his eyes she clearly exposes to him every ambush of the demons, the subterfuge of their thoughts, and what the consequence of each is. She places sound judgment in him for perceiving what is to come, and there dawns in his simplicity a secret light to perceive in all matters the [355]
force of the deliberations of subtle thoughts. And she points out to him as with a finger what he would have soon suffered if he had remained ignorant of these things. From thence there is born in him [*the knowledge*] that he must entreat his Provider with prayer for everything both small and great.

As soon as divine grace has made his thinking secure in all these matters, so that he puts his confidence in God, she begins to introduce him to temptations, little by little. She permits him to be sent temptations to his measure, that he may bear their force. But in these very temptations her aid palpably draws near to him, so that he may take courage, until little by little he gains experience, acquires wisdom, and holds his enemies in contempt because of the confidence he has in God. For it is not possible without temptations for a man to grow wise in spiritual warfare, to know his Provider and perceive his God, and to be secretly confirmed in his faith, save on the strength of the experience he has received in his own person.

But as soon as grace sees that a little self-esteem has begun to steal into a man's thoughts, and that he has begun to think great things of himself, she immediately permits the temptations opposing him to gain in strength and prevail, until he learns his weakness, and takes to flight, and seeks refuge with God in humility. By these things a man comes to the stature of a perfect man in the faith and hope of the Son Eph. 4:13

of God, and is lifted up unto love. For God's marvellous love of man is made known to him when he is in the midst of circumstances that cut off his hope; herein God shows His power by saving him. A man can never learn what divine power is while he abides in comfort and spacious living. Moreover, God has never perceptibly shown His action except in a region of stillness, in the desert, and in places bereft of chance encounters with men and of the turbulence of their habitations.

Do not be astonished if, when you begin to practise virtue, severe and intense tribulations break out against you from every quarter; for virtue is not accounted virtue if it is not accompanied by the difficulty of labors encountered in accomplishing it. For virtue itself is named from this very fact, as Saint John said, 'It is usual for hardships to assail virtue; virtue is blameworthy when it is linked to ease.' And the blessed Mark the Monk has said, 'Every virtue on being achieved is called a cross, when it fulfills the Spirit's commandment.' That is why all those who wish in the fear of the Lord to live in Jesus Christ, will
2 Tim. 3:12 suffer persecution. For He says, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. If any man will quicken his soul with comforts, he shall lose it; and if any man los-
Matt. 16:24; 10:39 eth it for My sake, he shall find it.' For this reason, then, He has gone in advance and has set the Cross in front of you, that you might sentence yourself to death, and then send forth your soul to go after Him.

[356] Nothing is stronger than desperation. It knows no defeat at the hand of any, whether they be on the right, or on the left. When in his mind a man cuts away any hope for his life, nothing can equal him in daring. None of his foes is able to face him, and there is no affliction the rumor of which makes his purpose weaken; for every affliction which may befall him is lighter than death, whereas he has bowed his head to receive precisely this. If, in every place, and under every circumstance, and on every occasion, in all that you wish to undertake, you set labors and grief as the aim of your resolution, you will find yourself at all times courageous and unhesitant in standing up against every seeming difficulty. Furthermore, through the power of your deliberations, all thoughts that dismay and frighten you will take flight from you, since these are customarily engendered in men by thoughts that look to comfort. Thus all things difficult and harsh that

you encounter will be light and easy for you. And indeed, your affairs often turn out contrary to what you expected, and perhaps you will never encounter any of those difficulties.

You yourself know that at all times the hope of comfort is wont to make men forget what is great, and good, and virtuous. Unless they resolve in their minds to suffer hardships, not even those who are found in this present world in the life of the flesh can attain the end of their desire. And since experience testifies to this, there is no need to prove it with words. For in every generation of those who have gone before us, even until now, it is this and nothing else that has made men feeble, so that they do not gain victories and are hindered from excellent deeds. Therefore, to sum up, we say: no man disdains the Kingdom of the Heavens except in hope of some small comfort in this life. And not only does he suffer this, but also many times mighty onslaughts and fearful temptations are prepared for the man who sets comfort as the aim of his will and whose thoughts follow after it, because that which governs him is desire.

Who does not know that even birds approach the trap because of a sight of repose? Can it be that by comparison, our knowledge is so much less than that of the birds as regards things concealed, or contingencies lying hidden in certain affairs, or in places, or whatever else with which the devil (who from the very first by the promise and thought of comfort) hunts us down? But because my mind has pursued its own desire, I have strayed from the goal I set at the beginning of my discourse: to show how we must always establish in our thinking the aim of tribulation in any matter by means of which we are about to start on the path to the Lord, and how right at the beginning we must diligently press on with all our strength in order to reach its end.

How often does a man raise questions when he wants to make a start in something for the Lord's sake, saying, 'Is there really comfort [357] in this?' Or, 'How can I easily make headway in this without toil?' Or, 'Perhaps there is tribulation in this, which causes the body pain?' Do you not observe how high and low we seek the name of comfort? What are you saying, O man? You wish to ascend to Heaven, and to receive that Kingdom, communion with God, the consolation of the spiritual goods of yonder blessedness, the fellowship of the angels, and immortal life, and you ask if this path requires toil? Great is this

marvel! Those who yearn after the things of this perishing world pass over the terrible waves of the sea, and they brave journeying on rough roads, and for all that, they never ask whether there is any labor in this, or any affliction in what they desire to do. But we search everywhere after comfort! If, however, we always keep in mind the path of crucifixion, we shall think that every other affliction is lighter to bear than this.

Could there be, perhaps, anyone at all who is unconvinced of the following? – that no one has ever gained victory in war, or received a fading crown, or had his heart's desire fulfilled (even in things unworthy of praise), or ministered in things divine, or achieved any of the glorious deeds of virtue, unless he has first set at naught labors and afflictions, and has driven away from his proximity the thinking that impels a man toward repose, which thinking begets heedlessness, sloth, pusillanimity, from which comes laxity in everything.

When the mind is zealous for virtue, then even our outward senses (that is, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) are not vanquished by difficult and repugnant labors beyond the wont and limits of their natural power. And when in due time our natural incensive faculty exerts its proper energy, then the life of the body is held in contempt more readily than dung. For as soon as the heart is zealous in spirit, the body is not grieved by tribulations, nor does it feel alarm and shrink back from horrors; but the mind hardens it against all temptations, making it like a diamond in its endurance.

Let us be zealous, too, with ardor of spirit for the sake of Jesus' will, and drive away all heedlessness from ourselves, which gives birth to sloth in our thinking. For zeal begets courage and fortitude of soul, as well as vigor of body. What power is there in demons to withstand us when our soul stirs up her own fierce natural zeal against them? Eagerness, moreover, is said to be born of zeal. And when this brings its power into action, it makes every force in the soul become unflinching. The very crowns of confession which the athletes and martyrs carried off by their endurance were won through the dual workings of zeal and eagerness, which are born of the power of natural desire. Hereby they became invulnerable to suffering amid the fierce pain of their torments. May God grant us also such eagerness to please Him. Amen.

Homily 73

On the benefit to be had from fleeing from the world

MIGHTY INDEED, trying and difficult, is the struggle that arises from the proximity of things. However much a man becomes eminent and strong, yet when the causes that bring on the onslaughts of wars and struggles come near him, fear grips him; he swiftly inclines toward a fall, even more than through encounter with the devil's open warfare. Therefore, as long as a man does not remove himself far from what his heart dreads, his enemy always has a coign of vantage against him. And if he drowses a little, his enemy readily destroys him.

There[1] the body is fearful of injury, but by every means it keeps itself distant from sin. But here[2] it is the soul that receives the invisible wound and cannot beat down her enemy who strives against her. For [*worldly*] things of themselves are able to arouse the turbulence of warfare against her, and voluntarily she is led away into captivity by them, though no warfare has assaulted her from without. Howbeit, the soul has her struggle in the provocations that are arrayed before the body's senses, as has been said somewhere: 'Whenever the harmful encounters of the world prevail upon the soul, these same become sharp stakes for her, and she is worsted as it were naturally whenever she comes in contact with them.'

Because our ancient Fathers, who walked these paths, knew full well that our mind is not at all times in vigorous health, that it is incapable of standing steadily in one state and of keeping guard on itself, and that there come times of darkness when it cannot even perceive what causes it injury, they considered the matter with wisdom, and clad themselves with non-possessiveness as a weapon. This frees a man from many struggles, as it is written, for by means of his indigence he can extricate himself from many transgressions. And they went out into the desert, where there is nothing that can be an occa-

1. I.e. in the desert. 2. I.e. in the world.

sion for the passions, in order that even when a moment of weakness should come, they would be unable to find occasions for falls. I mean they would have no occasion for anger, lust, the remembrance of wrongs, and glory, and that both these and their like would be at a minimum by reason of the desert. For they walled themselves up in the desert as in an impregnable tower. Thus each of them was able to finish his struggle in stillness, where the senses find no help for assisting our adversary through encounter with hurtful things. It is better for us to die in our struggle, than to live in our fall.

Homily 74

On the means whereby a man can acquire a change of his hidden thoughts with a change of his external discipline

As long as a man chooses to be free of possessions, departure from life always arises in his mind. He makes the life after the resurrection his continual study, and at all times he contrives to make preparation that will be useful yonder. He acquires disdain for every suggestion of honor and bodily ease that is sown in his thoughts, and the thought of scorning the world is lively in his mind at every moment. His mind becomes bold, and he acquires a heart that is always strong and courageous in every fear and danger of impending death; and he does not even fear death itself, because his attention is always upon it, as something that approaches him, and he awaits it. With undoubting confidence, he casts his care upon the Lord. If he meets afflictions, he is confident, knowing for a certainty that they will procure a crown for him. He patiently endures them with all joy, accepting them with exultation and gladness, since he knows that it is God Himself Who has provided these afflictions because of the profit gained from unknown causes through unmanifest acts of providence.

But if for some reason he should acquire something transient by the working and device of him who is adept in every evil, at that very moment love for the body begins to stir in his soul. He thinks of a long life and thoughts concerning ease of the flesh arise and continually blossom forth in him. He clings firmly to his body so that, if possible, it will not be vexed by anything, and he employs every means that could possibly provide his body with ease. Thus he departs from that freedom that is not subject to any of the thoughts produced by fear, and henceforth he ponders upon every notion that gives rise to cowardliness. He deliberates upon the causes of fear, because the former stoutheartedness, which he acquired in his soul when he was

higher than the world through his non-possessiveness, has been taken away from him. And because he has become an inheritor of the world in proportion to the degree of his possessions, he also becomes prey to fear in accord with the law and ordering ordained by God. We become slaves and bondsmen to that portion for which we prepare our members to labor, and we serve it with all fear, according to the word of the Apostle.

Rom. 6:16–23

Self-love precedes all the passions, and scorn of ease precedes all the virtues. The man who surrenders his body to comforts will be afflicted in the land of peace. He that indulges in luxury in his youth becomes a slave in old age, and in his last moments he groans. Just as a man whose head is submerged in the water cannot breathe the subtle air which is poured upon the [*atmosphere's*] empty gulf, so he who immerses his mind in the cares of the present life cannot take in the breath that is a perception of the new world. As the whiff of a deadly poison disturbs the constitution of the body, so does a lewd sight the peace of the mind.

As health and sickness cannot co-exist in a body without one destroying the other, so it is impossible for money and love to remain in a house without one of them being ruined by the other. As glass cannot remain whole when it lies near to a stone, so neither can a holy man who continues and persists for a long time seeing and speaking with a woman remain in his purity and be unsoiled. As trees are wrenched from their roots by a violent and continual flood of water, so love for the world is uprooted from the heart by a flood of temptations that surge against the body.

As medicines purge the body from the impurity of bad humors, so grievous afflictions purify the heart from evil passions. As a dead man cannot perceive the affairs of the living, so when a solitary is buried in stillness as in a tomb, his soul is exempt from the storm that customarily blows from perception of the affairs that take place in the society of men.

As a man cannot remain unscathed who spares his enemy on the field of battle, so the spiritual warrior cannot deliver his soul from destruction if he spares his body. As a child, terrified by some frightening sight, runs to its parents, clutches the hem of their garments, and cries out to them, so too with the soul; for the more she is straitened

and afflicted by fear arising from temptations, the more she hastens to cleave to God, crying out to Him with continual supplication. And so long as the temptations persist, one assaulting her after the other, she [362] multiplies her supplications; but once she finds herself again in spacious freedom, she gives herself over to wandering thoughts.

If men who are surrendered into the hands of judges to be punished for their wickedness humble themselves and straightway confess their iniquity when they come before the scourges, their punishment is diminished, and with only slight afflictions they are released. But if there are among them some who are wicked and stiff-necked, who refuse to confess, these are scourged, and in the end they confess involuntarily after many torments. And since their sides are already covered with wounds, they gain no profit from this.

So it is in our case. For because we have gathered transgressions without [*returning to the good*] direction, we are taken from the hands of divine mercy and surrendered into the hands of the justice of the Judge of all, and the command is given that we be stretched out before the rod of trials, so that our punishment yonder be made light. But if at that moment, as the Judge's rod nears us, we humble ourselves and recollect our iniquities and confess them before the Magistrate, then we shall escape with slight trials. But if, on the contrary, we become stiff-necked in our afflictions and do not confess that we are the cause of these and are worthy to suffer things even greater; if instead we blame other men, sometimes the demons, sometimes even God's justice; if we maintain that we are innocent of such deeds; and if we continue to think and say this without comprehending that God knows and understands more than we, that 'in all the earth are His judgments,' and that a man is not chastened unless He gives His Ps. 104:7 command: then everything that comes upon us will cause us constant sorrow, our tribulations will become very vehement, and we shall be handed over from one to another as in a chain.

Thus it will be until we come to know ourselves, humble ourselves, and perceive our sins (for unless we perceive our sins, we cannot be corrected); then finally having suffered many afflictions, we shall make a confession which is of no profit to us and brings us no consolation. But that a man should perceive his sins is a gift from God, which descends into his thinking when God sees that he has

been buffeted with manifold trials, lest he depart in the midst of all these calamities and afflictions having reaped no profit from this world. Our lack of understanding is not due to the difficulty of temptations, but to our ignorance. Often it happens that while some are in the midst of these trials, they depart from the world laden with guilt, since they did not confess, but rather denied and blamed. But the merciful God waited with the hope that somehow they might be humbled, so that He might forgive them and make for them a way of
1 Cor. 10:13 escape. And He would not only have provided them with a way of es-
[363] cape from their temptations, but would have forgiven them their transgressions by reason of the brief confession of their hearts.

As a man who offers a great gift to the king wins a cheerful countenance toward himself, so it is with the man whose prayer is accompanied by tears, for God the great King of the ages allows every degree of his sins and of all his transgressions to pass into oblivion and shows him a gracious countenance.

As a sheep that leaves its fold, and wandering here and there to graze, stands beside a lair of wolves, so too is the monk who separates himself from the assembly of his companions in the name of finding a quiet and solitary dwelling; for approaching and passing through cities, he draws near to sights and the marvels of the theaters and tarries with those whom he encounters.

A man who carries a pearl of great price on his back and journeys on a road infested with brigands and notorious for many crimes is in constant fear of being ambushed. Likewise the man who carries the pearl of chastity and journeys in the world on the road of his enemies has no hope of safety from thieves and plunderers, until he reaches the lodging-place of the tomb, which is the land of certainty. Is it possible that the man who carries a pearl of great price will have no fear? Even so, he who carries the pearl of chastity does not know in what place, by what enemies, in what moment they will observe him to strip him suddenly of his hope, though he be at the threshold of his house, that is, in old age.

As a man who drinks wine and gets drunk on a day of mourning forgets all the pangs of his sorrow, so the man who in this world (which is a house of lamentation) is drunk with the love of God, for-

gets all his sorrows and afflictions and becomes insensible to all sinful passions through his inebriation. His heart is made steadfast by hope in God, his soul is as light as a winged bird, at every moment his mind rises out of the earth and soars far above the heavens through the meditation of his thoughts, and he takes delight in the immortal things of the Most High, his prayer is unceasing, and he is like a man who has the wind for his steed, so that his enemy cannot overtake him. Every time he seeks him, he flies away from him.

He who takes compassion on the afflicted is like a man who has an advocate in a court of justice. As a man who is in peril at sea amid a tempest casts his baggage overboard, so too does he who despises the obstacles on the path of God amid this world, which is a sea ready to drown him. For obstacles will never be wanting.

Why do you trouble yourself in a house that is not your own? Let the sight of a dead man be a teacher for you concerning your departure from hence. Why do you increase your bonds? Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do not [364] find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.

The Cross is the door to mysteries. Through this door the mind makes entrance into the knowledge of heavenly mysteries. The knowledge of the Cross is concealed in the sufferings of the Cross. And the more our participation in its sufferings, the greater the perception we gain through the Cross. For, as the Apostle says, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.' 2 Cor. 1:5 Now by *consolation* he means *theoria,* which, being interpreted, is vision of soul. Vision gives birth to consolation.

Our soul cannot yield spiritual fruit unless our heart is dead to the world. For the Father raises up by the divine vision of all the ages the soul that has died [*with*] the death of Christ. And again, unless you die to the world, the spiritual Adam will not be quickened in you. For when a man through this spiritual sacrifice dies to all the dealings of this abode[1] and entrusts his life to the life that will be after the resurrection, grace will settle upon him and his mode of life will be spiritually strengthened. And when he hates the world, he will perceive

1. I.e. the world.

the mode of life of the new man, which is more lofty than the vileness of the dwelling of men, and he will be accounted worthy of divine revelations.

It is impossible for us to be dead to the world while still in the world so long as our thinking delights in ease, and the world through its objects lies before our senses, and through sensation renews our recollections, and arouses the body to desire by means of its proximity to objects, employing sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. The soul's deadness to the world consists in the heart's being void of all rumination upon recollections of the world, in the soul's abstaining from thoughts concerning the things of the world, and in the will's withholding itself from the love of deliberating about them. For it is impossible for our heart to enjoy peace that is exalted above disturbance, and the serenity of love that transcends this world, when renewed recollections pour into it from encounters with things through the senses that perceive them. The soul cannot acquire deadness to the world until the body is also far off from the perception and sight of things.

Homily 75

On night vigil and the various ways of its observance; and that we must not make the aim of our labors the fulfillment of a definite quantity of prayers, but rather with freedom and discernment we should be like children of God with their Father, laboring with the eagerness proper to love; and on how the work of vigil is more venerable than all other disciplines; and on what things are sought by those who choose this work; and on how men should perform night vigil; and on the gifts that these men are granted from God, and the conflicts and battles waged against them by the ruler of this world

WHEN YOU DESIRE TO STAND in the liturgy of your vigil, with God as your helper do as I tell you. Bend your knees, as is the custom, and rise up again, but do not immediately begin your liturgy. After you have made a prayer and completed it, and signed your heart and your limbs with the life-creating sign of the Cross, stand silently for a moment until your senses have been set at rest and your thoughts have become tranquil. Then raise up your inner vision to the Lord, and beseech Him with an afflicted soul to fortify your weakness, and to grant that the psalmody of your tongue and the reflections of your heart be pleasing to His will, saying quietly in the prayer of your heart the following:

A Prayer O Lord Jesus my God, Who overseest Thy creation, Thou to Whom my passions, the infirmity of our nature, and the might of our adversary are evident, do Thou Thyself shelter me from the wickedness of our common enemy, for great is his power, and wretched is our nature, and feeble is our strength. Wherefore, O Good One, Who knowest our weakness and hast borne upon Thyself the burdensomeness of our frailty, do Thou safeguard me from the turmoil of thoughts and the inundation of passions, and account me worthy to perform this sacred liturgy, lest perchance I should corrupt its sweetness by my passions and be found shameless and audacious before Thee.

With these thoughts your heart will be unlocked straightway by grace, and you will shed tears at the beginning of your prayer. Your thoughts will be purified by the memory of the Lord, and your soul will receive tranquillity and shining chastity. And while your mind is collected and shining, you will begin your liturgy without turmoil, and will joyously continue until its completion.

It behooves us to observe our liturgy in complete freedom from every childish and disquieting thought. If we see that there is little time, and that dawn will overtake us before we finish our liturgy, then let us voluntarily omit one *Glory be* [*of the Psalter*] with prudence, or even two, from that which is the customary rule, lest we give place to turmoil, and corrupt the sweet taste of our liturgy, and make turbid the psalms of the early morning.

If, while you observe your liturgy, a thought should accost you and whisper to you, saying, 'Hasten a little, your work is multiplying,' and you free yourself of it quickly, then do not place some rule upon yourself. But if this thought disturbs you the more, immediately go back to the last *Glory be,* or as many as you like, and with understanding repeatedly chant each verse that has the character of a prayer. And if again the thought troubles you, or straitens you, leave off your psalmody, and bend your knees in prayer, saying: 'I do not wish to count up words, but to attain to [*heavenly*] mansions; I shall journey on every path that takes me there quickly. That people which in the wilderness cast the calf, journeyed there forty years, ascending and descending the mountains and hills, and they did not behold the promised land even from afar.'

But if, in your night vigil, you are overwhelmed by your long standing and you become feeble from fatigue, and a thought should say to you – or rather, the wily fiend himself should address you by the thought as in the serpent of old, saying, 'Finish up, for you can stand no longer'; then say to it: 'No, but I shall sit down, for even this is better than sleep. Although my tongue is silent and utters no psalm, yet my mind is engaged with God in prayer and in my converse with Him; wakefulness is always more profitable than sleep.'

Neither standing nor simple psalmody fully constitutes a monk's
[367] vigil. One man continues in psalmody all the night long; another passes the night in repentance, compunctionate entreaties, and pros-

trations; another in weeping, tears, and lamentation over his sins. It is written concerning one of our fathers that for forty years his prayer consisted of but one saying, 'I, as a man, have sinned; but do Thou, as God, forgive me.'[1] The fathers heard him sorrowfully meditating upon this verse, and how he wept and would not be silent; this prayer took the place of his liturgy both night and day.

Another man spends part of his evening in psalmody and the rest of the night he chants *troparia,* glorifications, hymns, and other mournful melodies. And there is one who divides the hours of the night among the *kathismata;* and between *kathismata* he lights a lamp and refreshes himself with [*reading from*] the Scripture until he is rested. And again another makes for himself the rule not to bend his knees – not even in the prayer that concludes a *Glory be,* though this is customary during vigils – and he passes the entire night stretched out standing upright. It is said concerning one of the saints, that because the thought of fornication warred against him and did not cease from employing every means against him, he gave himself over to the labor of night vigil. He laid upon himself the rule not to bend his knees at all, but to stand throughout the night, keeping his eyes open, and to refrain from kneeling until the morning.[2]

These are all distinctions in the labor of vigil, and by them strenuous men put off the old man, which is corrupted by deceitful lusts, and put on Christ and are saved. By these kinds of labors performed with wisdom, the saints are accounted worthy of the awestruck wonder of divine revelation, which surpasses the mind of the flesh. Eph. 4:22, 24

Delighting in such diverse things and their like during their vigils, the strenuous pass the entire duration of the long hours of the night without despondency. Their souls flourish and rejoice and forget the garment of flesh, woven from passions, wherewith they are shrouded. From the delight and the leaping of their hearts, they do not bring sleep to mind, for they think that they have put off the body or have already reached that state which will be theirs after the resurrection. And because of their great joy they sometimes leave off psalmody, and they fall on their faces on account of the onrush of joy that surges in their souls.

1. Abba Apollo. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. I, p. 270, ch. xxxviii.
2. St. Moses the Ethiopian. Ibid., p. 217, ch. x.

The whole length of the night is as the day to them, and the coming of darkness is as the rising of the sun by reason of that hope which exalts their hearts and inebriates them by its meditation, and from the blazing of their minds which burn with the recollection of the good things of the age to come. While their tongue plays on the spiritual lyre, their mind looks after its own matters. Sometimes it turns toward the sense of the verses, sometimes it repulses an alien
[368] thought as it appears, and sometimes, when the soul grows weary, the mind turns to the contents of the reading for the day. For the narrations that it gathers from this source and lays away in its treasury produce insights at such times, and it takes such pleasure in them that there is no room at all for foreign thoughts. But once more the mind is swiftly drawn and brought to the thought of prayer and psalmody, lest by tarrying in those insights (though indeed reflection upon them is profitable) it should be deprived of converse with God and the light of divine vision, which the mind is wont to receive from undistracted prayer, when with reverent thoughts it speaks solely with the Lord in the secrecy of the heart. And so in these things they pass their whole lives, each one of them pleasing his Lord by his labors according to his measure and his strength, while he employs all the power of his will.

But if a man wishes to give his body a little rest, let him stop and sit down, facing the east. Howbeit, so long as he is sitting, he should not allow his mind to be idle, but he should consider and muse and reflect upon the magnitude of this discipline: on what it consists of and on how toilsome is its labor; on how great is its crown and on how glorious is the fruit of its work; on what watchfulness it requires; on how the men of old practised it, and of what things they were accounted worthy by completing their struggles; and on how the mercy of Jesus plucked him out of the world, when he toiled in vain labors whose end is to be lost to God and to endure shame for his sins; and on how he was brought to this angelic ministry, the hope of which is a true hope, the joy of which is never mastered by sorrow, and the confident trust of which is never defrauded. However much a man should toil, his labor will be slight in comparison to what he is to receive at his end (as an earnest of those good things) so that his soul may rejoice.

Now while he reflects in his heart on these and similar thoughts, he is astonished. He sends forth his mind upon the spiritual chariot, causing it to take wing and to muse upon all the holy Fathers of all generations, the inheritance of whose discipline he possesses: how each of them in different ways has accomplished this spiritual husbandry, and how they abandoned the inhabited world and mankind itself, and wrested themselves from the distractions of the world and from a life full of turmoil; how they departed and hid themselves in mountains, caves, and in solitary, secluded places, because they saw that this discipline cannot be perfectly accomplished in the society of men on account of the many obstacles; and how these men became dead during their lives for the sake of the life that is in God, wandering in desert regions and amid rocky crags like men who have lost their way, and how the entire world is not comparable to the glory of any one of them. Heb. 11:38

Some of them dwelt on sheer and rugged crags, some at the foot of [369] mountains or in deep gorges, some in dens and hollows of the earth Ibid. like men who burrow in the ground to lay snares for foxes, some in tombs, and some on the peaks of mountains. Some erected small hovels in the desert and therein passed the rest of their lives. And some built small stone enclosures on the summits of mountains, that is, small cells, and dwelt there as pleasurably as though they were in the palaces of kings. They had no concern for how they could find their livelihood, but only how each of them could please God and bring his struggle to completion in a beautiful way.

And what manner of life did these holy men lead in these places? Did they live in the body, or did their life, perhaps, transcend flesh and blood? Did they become faint-hearted in the desolation of that desert? Did their power of patient endurance succumb over that long span of time, did their body grow weak during those many years because of the deprivation of the necessities required by nature? How was human life preserved in them? And besides all this, what struggles and afflictions did they undergo? How did they so manfully and calmly brave the manifold and different warfares that the evil spirits raised up against them? How is it that they did not grow slack in their arduous and wearisome labors throughout their lifetime even until their end? How did their spirit not become melancholy by reason of

that utter solitude, being cut off from all visible consolations? Is there really all this strength in human nature? And how did divine power preserve them uninjured through all those manifold trials, how did it provide each of them with varying kinds of sustenance according to the place of his abode, thus supplying that necessity which he lacked?

Some of them were sustained by a bird. 'Behold,' said one, 'these last sixty years I have received half a loaf from this bird!'[3] And again, some were nourished by a certain tree, or a date-palm, in a supernatural way, even as one of them said, I mean the bishop who repented in the desert, 'I have now been in this desert forty-nine years, and God has granted me life by means of this date-palm.'[4] And so it was with the saint who dwelt in sin for six months and then departed into the inner desert to repent of his sin. And when his stomach caused him much pain, an angel came and cured him.[5] Some were nourished by wild animals, like that blessed man who dwelt in a cavern in the desert of Sodom. Some, who abode in the desert near the inhabited world, were provided for by men, like that valiant man whom Serapion saw, and like the blessed Martinian[6] who dwelt on a silent island and was visited by a merchant twice a year.

But where no habitation was near and there were no means [*to pro-*
[370] *vide for their needs*], they were visited by an angel, as it is said concerning the blessed Apelles who dwelt on a mountain-side in a small cave. His work consisted in offering up prayer to God throughout the day and one hundred times during the night. Without solicitude on his part, his food was brought to him in the desert by an angel. He was clad in a sleeveless garment and on his head he wore a small cowl; and these remained on him in the desert without wearing away. Do you see how God cares for His servants in every respect?

And others were nourished by roots; others by edible herbs which sprout up of themselves; others by small crops which require watering and by dried vegetables carefully sown; and others by the fruits of trees. For some a celery bed and a trickling stream were sufficient for the needs of this fleeting life, so that the body's vitality would be maintained. But as for the rest, grace stirred up profitable recollec-

3. St. Paul the Hermit. Budge, *PHF*, Vol. I, p. 201, ch. ii.
4. Ibid., pp. 238–39, ch. xviii.
5. St. Timothy the Hermit. Ibid., pp. 236–38, ch. xvii. 6. Celebrated on Feb. 13.

tions during those times [*of need*] for the consolation of these men.

When a man ponders in his mind upon these and similar things, he becomes drunk as with unmingled wine and forgets himself. But afterward, seeing himself again, he marvels that throughout all that journey in the desert and encounter with the saints his mind has met with nothing harmful[7] at all. But now it seems to him that at that time he was actually with those saints and saw them clearly. And by reason of his remembrance of the lives of the saints which his mind conceives through recalling their histories, and by reason of his musing upon them, from henceforth his despondency vanishes, sloth is put to flight, his limbs are strengthened, sleep is driven away from his eyelids, his thought becomes bold and casts off fear, distraction is manfully defeated, the mind is concentrated, and intense ardor is kindled in the heart, and ineffable joy arises in the soul. And further, sweet tears moisten the cheeks, spiritual jubilation inebriates the understanding, the soul receives inexpressible consolations, hope supports the heart and makes it courageous. Then it seems to that man that he dwells in Heaven during his vigil which is so replete with good things. By these and similar means those who labor in vigils with discretion go forward. For there is nothing that makes the mind so radiant and joyous and so enlightens it and expels evil thoughts, causing the soul to exult, as do continual vigils.

For this very reason all the holy Fathers persevered in this labor of vigil and held fast to the rule of remaining vigilant in the night throughout the entire course of their lives. But they did so especially because they heard our Saviour in many places earnestly admonish us by His living word: 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray at all times'; Luke 21:36
and, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation'; and again, Matt. 26:41
'Pray and weary not,' and so forth. And as if it were not sufficient that 1 Thess. 5:17
He should admonish us by words alone, He also gave us an example in His own Person, in that at all times He honored the practice of prayer above all other things. Hence He continually separated Him- [371]
self for prayer, and not indiscriminately, but He chose the night for this, and as a place, the desert. Hereby [*He taught*] us to withdraw Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35
from all clamor and tumult, so that we could pray in stillness, as is proper.

7. I.e. an evil thought or distraction.

Moreover all the revelations that were given to the saints concerning particular matters, whether they served to make them prudent or were for the common instruction of men, came to them for the most part during the night and at the time of prayer. Therefore our Fathers received this lofty teaching concerning prayer as it were from our Saviour Himself, and they received vigilance through prayer as being a commandment of the Apostle. They pre-eminently chose silence and seclusion from all things, so that through continuance in prayer they might be uninterruptedly near God. They fled into solitude not only to avoid any hindrances to their continual liturgy, but also lest perchance any alien thing should assail them from without and perturb the pure luster of their mind and disquiet their gladdening vigils which are a light to the soul.

But furthermore, they ate sparingly, lest the vapor that rises up from a full stomach should cloud the mind, and its discriminating tranquillity be disturbed, and it be robbed of the spiritual delight that prayer imparts. In short, in every respect they were very assiduous to be able to speak with God without a veil, in so far as possible, their mind being unencumbered by anything whatsoever.

Now because Satan is also persuaded that all these good things are laid up within this astonishing work, which in the body of the virtues occupies, as it were, the place of the soul for all the members, he envies it more than all other disciplines. And this all men also know by experience; for there is nothing else in a man by which the devil is so provoked, and burns with such jealousy, and against which he makes such preparations for war, as night vigil, whether a man be a solitary, a cenobite, or a layman. Here he can no longer restrain himself, but he shows himself clearly in open conflict against vigil, employing no intermediary, although he does not perceive at all the gifts which those who keep vigil receive in secret. But he envies them especially for the chaste form of their standing, and for their perseverance against sleep through their wakefulness in glorifications and psalmody, and for their prayers made with bows and the stretching-out of their hands, with prostrations and lying on the ground, and for heartfelt supplications throughout the night.

Still, he is even more envious on account of others, who although they lie on their pallets like dead men and he makes sport of them as

he pleases by sordid visions and lewd dreams, and the whole night long he causes them to wallow as it were in mire by means of various phantasies which arise in their heavy sleep from the fullness of their bellies, yet even so these same men henceforth form in their souls that [372] wakeful state which belongs to the resurrection. And he sees that although they are still enclosed in the veil of the flesh, and at every hour are assailed by the waves of mortality, and are bounded by a life that is held under the domain of this world's atmosphere, yet they still manifest in their mortal nature the figure of that manner of life which is to come.

Prayer offered up at night possesses a great power, more than the prayer of the day-time. Therefore all the righteous prayed during the night, while combatting the heaviness of the body and the sweetness of sleep and repelling corporeal nature. And this the prophet also says, 'I toiled in my groaning; every night I will wash my bed, with tears will I water my couch,' while he sighed in fervent prayer. And Ps. 6:5 again, 'At midnight I arose to give thanks unto Thee for the judgments of Thy righteousness.' And for every entreaty for which they Ps. 118:62 urgently besought God, they armed themselves with the prayer of night vigil, and at once they received their request.

There is nothing that even Satan fears so much as prayer that is offered during vigilance at night. And even if it is offered with distraction, it does not return empty, unless perhaps that which is asked for is unsuitable. For this reason the devil smites them with violent warfare, in order to hinder them, if possible, from this work – I mean those who continually practise it. But those who have resisted his wicked stratagems even a little, who have tasted the gifts of God that are granted during vigil, and who have experienced in themselves the magnitude of God's help that is always nigh to them, utterly disdain him and all his devices. Therefore the order of the solitaries, even more than the entire community of the Church, wages war against him by the struggle of prayer and vigil, on the one hand because they are unencumbered by visible things, and on the other because of their continual stillness. Since they are liberated from many affairs, the devil can no longer turn away their thoughts from reflection upon God or obstruct them from their continual supplications in their contest with him. So it is that from the very beginning of their training

until their deep old age they did not neglect the labor of vigils in any way whatever, but they knew well the work of standing throughout the entire night, even as we learn from the written histories of each one of them.

Saint Athanasius, in his history of that example for solitaries, Anthony, says that he kept very long vigils, so that he passed the greater part of the night without sleep. And it was in fact because of this that Satan found cause to assail this glorious man with his first conflict, and this occurred when the saint was still a young man. We find it frequently recorded in many of the narrations concerning him, that he never neglected vigil throughout his whole lifetime, even when he
[373] went out to meet others at an appointed time. An example of this is when he went to see the blessed elder Paul, for after they ate the meal brought by a bird they stood in prayer all night long. Which of the solitaries, though possessing all the virtues together, could neglect this work, and not be reckoned to be idle without it?

For night vigil is the light of the thinking; and by it the understanding is exalted,[8] the thought is collected, and the mind takes flight and gazes at spiritual things and by prayer is rejuvenated and shines brilliantly. Through vigil there are bestowed on a man the earnests of the good things of the life to come and the graces of those gifts, the mysteries of which are indicated in the holy Scriptures. Hence our Fathers did not neglect this labor from the beginning of their discipleship until they reached the measure of perfection. So it was that even at the time of deep old age, when a man can hardly stand on his feet, they did not allow sloth to prevail against them and, by giving rest to their bodies with a little sleep, to hinder them from continual vigilance during the night.

This we also learn from the narrations which are told concerning that perfect image of virtue and of all spiritual accomplishments,[9] I mean the blessed Arsenius. When that celebrated man of Scete had totally withdrawn himself from all intercourse with men and had removed his dwelling far into the desert, distant even from the brethren, he gave himself completely over to the wondrous practice of vigil. His standing during his vigil differed even from that of all the

8. This is also the Syriac word for *crucified* (i.e. *lifted up* with *on a cross* understood).
9. Lit. *beauties.*

fathers of his time, and his history bears witness to this. On the eve, it is said, of the Lord's day, he would leave the sun behind his back and stretch out his hands toward heaven, until the sun rose and shone in his face.[10] And again, in another place it is said that he would pass the whole night in vigil, and when on account of nature he wished for the approach of morning so that he might have a little rest, he would struggle with sleep and say, 'Be gone from me, wicked handmaid!'[11] This was when he was quite aged, when it was said that he stooped from old age.

But so that his fortitude in vigil be better known, let us hear another tale concerning him, how he undauntedly withstood all his deep old age and weakness, being a man of ninety years. Once he called his two disciples, who were themselves great fathers, and he said to them, 'Because the demons are striving with me and I do not know but that they rob me by sleep, labor here with me this night in your vigils, and watch me and see if I fall asleep during my vigil.' So they sat down, one on his right hand and one on his left, from the evening even until the morning. And they said, 'We slept and we awoke, and we did not observe that he slept at all. But when it began to be light there came to us three times the sound of breathing in his nostrils, but [374] whether he did this purposely so that we might think he slept or whether slumber had really fallen upon him, we know not. And he stood up and said to us, "Have I been asleep?" And we answered and said to him, "We do not know, O father, for we ourselves were asleep."'[12]

In the sweet labors of vigil the leaders of our way of life took their delight. And what was the sweetness that the heroic Arsenius received from this hardship wherewith he so greatly tormented his body? For it is clear that he did not endure all these things to no purpose. We see that not only was his inner man enlightened by a radiance from on high so that he rejoiced, but also his outward man, the nature of which is corruptible and dense, was clad with the glory in which all the saints will be arrayed at the end [*of the world*], because of the transfiguration that the whole inner nature of man undergoes.

From whence do we learn this? Once one of the brethren went to

10. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 24, #105.
11. Ibid., p. 30, #133.
12. Ibid., pp. 25–6, #113.

the cell of Abba Arsenius, and he looked through the window, and saw the Elder standing, and his whole body was like a burning fire. For that brother who had gone to see the Elder was worthy of this vision, since he was not one of the lesser brethren, but one of the great ones. Because the blessed Arsenius was famous for the loftiness of his discipline, all the fathers desired to see him, but especially because they very rarely saw him, even as Abba Macarius said to him, 'Why do you flee from us?' Therefore the strangers also who came to Scete chiefly desired to see him and to receive his blessing. Now when that brother (to resume the narration) knocked at his door, the Elder came out to him. And seeing that the brother was marvelling at something which he had seen, he said to him, 'Have you been knocking a long time? Peradventure you have seen something?' And he said to him, 'No.' So he dismissed him.[13]

And what shall I say of the blessed Pachomius? For this man was the equal of Arsenius and a leader among the rest, distinguished in struggles, heroic in the wakefulness of vigil. He spent much time in striving with the demons like an illustrious athlete after the manner of Saint Anthony. And because many demons came against him during the night, that is, when he kept vigil, he besought God to remove sleep from him both by day and by night, so that he might not sleep at all, and might be able to bring low the power of the enemy, even as
Ps. 17:38 it is written, 'I shall not turn back until they fail,' for they are powerless against the faith which is in the Lord. Now this gift was given unto him, even as he had asked, for a certain time. And because he was pure of heart – for the vision of his soul was purified by night vigil, stillness, and prayer – he saw God, Who is invisible, as it were in a mirror.[14] These are the fruits of vigil, these are the blessings of those who labor at it, and these are the crowns of its struggle.

[375] And if, my brother, you also wish to be a partaker with these saints and an heir to their way of life, without despondency hold fast to stillness, so that you may also persevere in unremitting prayer. Endure its afflictions, that you may keep possession of its blessings.

And if your body for various reasons should become weary and desist from its labor, and you should not be able to accomplish the works of stillness as usual, and if thereafter your conscience should

13. Ibid., p. 145, #625.

14. Ibid., pp. 24–5, #108.

begin to condemn you, and you should grow despondent and dejected (for indeed it is the work of the conscience unceasingly to reprehend and trenchantly to reprove us, especially if our intention is good), do not say: 'Woe to me, for I am idle! It would be better for me to be outside [*my cell*] and to do any virtuous work whatever, rather than have this vain reputation of being a hesychast and recluse, being idle as I am in its liturgy – that is, to be a solitary and all alone, yet far from the duties proper [*to stillness*]!' Do not say this. For our sweet God bears the burden of our weakness. He only asks of a man that which he has, and He knows better than we what our strength is.

When your strength is sufficient, toil. And even if you are not able to do anything at all, be joyful, accept the idleness of stillness, and be patient. But know that if you go out from stillness, not even this thought, which stirs up your conscience to smite you for your idleness, will remain with you. On the contrary, many accidents will befall you on account of the distraction and laxity of your senses, and they will corrupt even those virtuous deeds you performed previously, because the grace of stillness has been taken from you. And you will fall into temptations and encounter many accidents against your will.

But though you fall into temptations, do not despair. For there is no merchant who journeys on seas and highways and does not suffer losses, and there is no husbandman who merely reaps his harvest, and there is no athlete who does not suffer blows and buffeting, even though he should take the victory in the end. So it is also with the things of God, with the affairs of the merchants who travel this invisible path, for herein there are both profits and losses, wounds and triumph. Even if you are smitten, do not turn back. Forgive me.

Homily 76

An answer that Saint Isaac made to a brother who asked him, 'Why is it that, although our Lord defined mercy as likeness to the majesty of the Heavenly Father, solitaries honor stillness above mercy?' And a defense concerning this; and that it is not right to neglect the afflicted and the sick when they are near

IT IS WELL THAT YOU BROUGHT FORWARD from the Gospel a comparison and an example for the investigation of the great discipline of stillness, as though we were opposed to it or sought to abolish it as something superfluous. The Lord defines the showing of mercy as likeness to the Heavenly Father because it brings near to Him those who practise it, and this is true. Nor do we who are solitaries honor stillness apart from mercy, but as far as possible we strive to be far removed from cares and turmoil. It is not our wish to refuse to do necessary things when they present themselves, but to make stillness our only concern, that we may be constant in converse with God, whereby we are most able to filter out our turbid waters and draw near to tranquillity of mind. If rarely it should happen that for a time a certain necessity as regards the brethren should come upon us, we must not neglect this.

Matt. 5:48

Thus we constantly compel ourselves at all times to be inwardly merciful to the entire nature of rational creatures. For so the Lord's teaching instructs us, and it is not by chance that it is this which characterizes our stillness. It is needful not merely to preserve this inner mercy of ours, but when the time suitable for works and certain necessities require it, we must not neglect to give evident proof of our love. This is especially true for those who have not chosen total stillness (that is, not to meet with any man), but who hold to the rule of stillness throughout the week or for periods of seven weeks. Such men, even when they are within the confines of their rule, do not restrain themselves from fulfilling the works of mercy, unless there be one who is extremely abrupt, coarse, and inhuman, who wishes to

practise stillness before the faces and eyes of men. We know, however, that the mind cannot be illumined by converse and love for God apart from the love of our neighbor.

What sagacious monk, possessing food and clothing, can see his neighbor hungry and naked, and will not give him whatever he has, sparing nothing? And again, who, upon seeing another who bears the same flesh as his own, wasted away by illness, exhausted by hardship and in need of help, would prefer his rule of seclusion to the love of his neighbor by reason of his ardent love of stillness? When, however, no such occasion arises, we observe love and mercy toward the brethren in our minds. But when the occasion is at hand, God requires of us to fulfill and perform mercy with manifest works.

Hence it is evident that if we have not acquired possessions, we are not permitted to descend into cares and anxieties for the sake of the poor; but if we do have means, it is demanded of us. Again, if because of our way of life we are far from the habitation and intercourse of men and from the sight of them, there is no need for us to leave our cell, our solitary and secluded dwelling, and to give ourselves over to roaming throughout the world to visit the sick and busy ourselves with ministrations of such matters. For it is obvious that such a thing brings a man from a higher state to a lower one. Howbeit if a man lives in the society of men and his dwelling is near to them and he is comforted by the labors of other men, whether at a time of sickness or of health, then he must render the same service; but he should not by any means ask others for such comfort. And if he should see a son of the same flesh as his own, who shares the same likeness, to be in straitness, yea rather Christ Himself outcast and worn with weariness, and he should flee and hide himself from him, falsely imagining that he is practising stillness, then he, and those like him, are without mercy.

Do not bring forward John the Theban and Arsenius and say, 'Who of such men gave himself over to works of this sort, or cared for the sick and the poor, so neglecting their stillness?' Do not even speak of the deeds of such men! For if you are distant from all human comfort and intercourse as they were, the Lord will permit you to scorn such practices; but if you fall short of that perfect state, and at all times you are found in bodily labors and company with men, for

what reason do you disregard the commandments that your measure is obliged to keep, employing as an excuse the great discipline of the saints, which in fact you have never even approached?

But as for me, I will not neglect the saying concerning Saint Macarius the Great, which was recorded as a censure of those who despise
[378] their brethren. Once he went to visit a certain brother who was sick. When Saint Macarius asked the brother if there were anything he wanted, he replied that he wanted a little freshly baked bread. He said this because all the monks of that place had then the custom of baking bread once a year, at most. Straightway, therefore, that man worthy of blessedness stood up, and though he was ninety years of age, he walked from Scete to Alexandria forty miles and more with dried bread laid up in his cloak, and he exchanged it and brought to the sick man that which he besought.[1]

And Abba Agatho, a man like unto the great Macarius, did something even greater than this. He was more experienced than all the other monks of his time and he both honored and loved stillness and silence above them all. This wondrous man, therefore, went at the time of a festival to sell his handwork, and in the market-place he found a foreigner, sick and outcast. He then rented a house and stayed with him, working with his own hands and spending on him the proceeds of his labor and paying the rent of the house. Thus he served him for six months, until the sick man became well. Abba Agatho, as it is told of him, was wont to say, 'I should wish to find a leper, give him my body and receive his.'[2] This is perfect love.

Those who fear God, O beloved, are cheerfully assiduous in keeping the commandments, even if labors are required to do so and they imperil themselves for their sake. The Life-giver confined the fullness of the commandments in, and made them to hang upon, two which embrace all: the love of God, and a love similar thereto, the love of His image. The first achieves the goal of the spirit's divine vision. The second achieves [*the goal of*] divine vision and *praxis*. For since the Divine nature is simple, uncompounded, invisible, and naturally not subject to want, the conscious mind in its meditation does not naturally require *praxis,* nor any sort of physical activity, nor gross material concepts. Indeed, its operation is simple and it is active in

1. Budge, *PHF,* Vol. II, p. 92, #402. 2. Ibid., pp. 98–99, #422 and 426.

one portion of the understanding, in a manner corresponding to the simplicity of that worshipful Cause which transcends the perception of the flesh. The second commandment is the love of man in accord with the duality of human nature; consequently its observance is twofold. I mean that we invisibly fulfill it in our conscience, and at the same time we fulfill it with the body, and not only in an evident manner, but secretly as well. And that which is fulfilled by outward actions should be likewise fulfilled in our conscious mind.

For as man was constituted from two parts, soul and body, so all things pertaining to him are accomplished in a twofold manner, corresponding to the duality of his state. And because *praxis* everywhere precedes divine vision, it is impossible for a man to rise to that lofty portion[3] unless he first fulfills by labor what is lower. Now no one can dare to say concerning the love of his neighbor that he progresses in [379] it within his soul, if he forsakes that part of it which is fulfilled by the body in accordance with his strength, the time, and the place, which things aid him in doing the deed. For only then is that portion of love verified that is held and apprehended in the conscience. When in outward action we are faithful and true in so far as possible, then our soul is given power to stretch upward to that great portion of sublime and divine *theoria* in intellections that are simple and without form. But where there is no possibility to practise the love of neighbor in visible actions with the body, the love of our neighbor fulfilled in our thinking alone suffices in the eyes of God, especially if we are able continually to practise that all-embracing portion[4] that is superior to the love of neighbor.

But if we are destitute of this all-embracing portion, let us fill up its lack by the commandment that follows it, which is visible *praxis*. Let us fulfill this by the toil of our body for the consolation of our brethren, lest, when we vainly labor in the name of solitude, our freedom be a pretext for subjection to the flesh. It is evident that the man who is separated from the company of men, whose mind is wholly immersed in God, who is dead to all men by reason of his absence from them, is not permitted to serve and minister to men. A man, however, who observes a rule of stillness for a period of seven weeks or for seven days at a time, and who, after completing his rule, meets and

3. I.e. divine vision.

4. I.e. the love of God.

associates with men and receives consolation in their company, but neglects his brethren who suffer affliction, thinking all the while that he is thus strictly observing his rule of seven: the same is merciless and crude. For it is very clear that it is because he has no mercy, because of conceit, and because of his fallacious thoughts, that he does not deign to undertake such deeds.

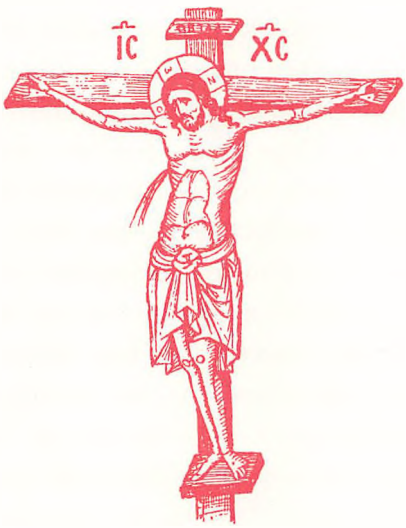
He who despises the sick will not see light, and the day of him who turns his face from a man straitened by affliction will become darkness; and he who scorns the voice of one suffering hardship, the sons of his house will grope their way in blindness.

Let us not in our ignorance defame the great name of stillness. For every discipline there is a time, a place, and a distinction, and it is known to God whether its labor is acceptable. But except this be the case, vain is the labor of all those who strive after the degree of perfection. The man who hopes to be comforted and visited in his infirmity by others will humble himself and will toil together with his neighbor at the time of temptation, that his work may be joyful in his stillness, being far removed from any conceit and delusion of the demons. One of the saints, a man possessing spiritual knowledge, said that nothing has such power to release a monk from the demon of
[380] pride, and to strengthen the frontier of chastity when the passion of fornication is kindled, as visiting the sick who lie upon their beds and waste away in the affliction of their flesh. Great is the angelic practice of stillness, when such discretion as this is conjoined with it, because there is a need for humility. By that which we overlook, we are robbed and plundered.

I have said these things, my brother, not so that we should neglect and despise the work of stillness; for in every place we exhort you to this work, and we do not now oppose what we have said elsewhere. Let no one take hold of, and bring forth out of context, a statement from our words and leave the rest, senselessly clutching that alone in his hands. I recall that in many places I have said with entreaty that even if it should happen that a man is totally idle in his cell by reason of the constraint of illness (which is wont to befall us), he should not for this cause think that a complete departure from his cell and works performed outside of it are superior to his idleness within his cell. But by a complete departure I do not refer to the circumstance when a

necessity arises, causing you to depart from your cell for several weeks in order to purchase what is required for the consolation and life of your neighbor; do not judge this to be idleness and a waste of time.

But if a man thinks that he is perfect and above everything of this life because of his continuance with God and his withdrawal from all visible labors, then with reason he may also refrain from these things. Great is the work of discernment practised by those whom God helps! And may He grant us to fulfill His word, 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.' To Him be glory and honor from all creation unto the ages of ages. Amen. Luke 6:31



Homily 77

On how much honor humility obtains, and how very lofty is its rank

WISHING TO OPEN MY MOUTH, O brethren, and to speak on the exalted theme of humility, I am filled with fear, even as a man who understands that he is about to discourse concerning God with the art of his own words. For humility is the raiment of the Godhead. The Word Who became man clothed Himself in it, and therewith He spoke to us in our body. Every man who has been clothed with it has truly been made like unto Him Who came down from His own exaltedness, and hid the splendor of His majesty, and concealed His glory with humility, lest creation should be utterly consumed by the contemplation of Him. Creation could not look upon Him unless He took a part of it to Himself, and conversed with it thus; nor could it hear the words of His mouth face to face.

The sons of Israel were not even able to hear His voice when He
Deut. 5:25 ff. spoke with them from the cloud. How, then, should creation be able to bear the vision of Him openly? The Israelites were so afflicted that they said to Moses, 'Let God speak with thee, and thou shalt hear His
Exod. 20:19 words for us: and let not God speak with us, lest we die.'

So terrible is the sight of God that even the mediator [*Moses*] said,
Heb. 12:21 'I exceedingly fear and quake.' The splendor of His glory appeared on Mount Sinai; and the mountain smoked and quaked in fear of the revelation that was in it, so that even the beasts that approached the lower parts of it died. The sons of Israel made ready and prepared themselves, keeping themselves chaste for three days according to
Exod. 19:15 the command of Moses, that they might be made worthy of hearing the voice of God, and of the vision of His revelation. And when the time was come, they could not receive the vision of His light and the fierceness of the voice of His thunders.

But now, when He has poured out His grace upon the world through His own Coming, He has descended not in an earthquake,

not in a fire, not in a terrible and mighty sound, but 'like rain upon a fleece, and like rain-drops that fall upon the earth' softly, and He was seen conversing with us after another fashion. This came to pass when, as though in a treasury, He concealed His majesty with the veil of His flesh, and among us spoke with us in that [*body*] which His own bidding wrought for Him out of the womb of the Virgin, even Mary the Theotokos. All this He did so that on beholding Him Who was of our race conversing with us, we should not be smitten with terror by the vision of Him.

3 Kgs. 19:11–12
Ps. 71:6
Heb. 10:20

Wherefore every man has put on Christ when he is clothed with the raiment wherein the Creator was seen through the body that He put on. For the likeness in which He was seen by His own creation and in which He kept company with it, He willed to put on in His inner man, and to be seen therein by His fellow servants. Instead of a robe of honor and outward glory, He was arrayed in this. When rational and irrational creation beholds any man clad in this likeness,[1] it worships him as master, for the sake of its own Master's honor, Whom it beheld clad and walking therein. For what creature does not feel reverence at the spectacle of a humble man? And yet until the glory of humility was revealed to all, this vision which is filled with holiness was held in disdain. But now its majesty has dawned on the eyes of the world, and every man honors this likeness in every place where it is seen. In this mediator, creation has been counted worthy of receiving the vision of its Creator and Maker. Wherefore not even by the enemies of the truth is it despised; and even if he who has acquired it is the neediest of all creation, yet by it he is honored as though by the diadem and the purple.

Phil. 2:7

No man ever hates, or wounds with a word, or despises him that is humble, for because his Master loves him, he is loved by all. He loves all and is loved by all. All men long after him, and in every place that he approaches they see him as an angel of light, and mark him out with honor. And though the wise man and the teacher discourse, they are silenced, that they might yield their place for the humble man to speak. The eyes of all give heed to his mouth, and to whatever word that issues forth from it; and every man waits on his words even as on the words of God. His brevity of speech is like the words of sophists

1. I.e. humility.

who scrutinize the nuances of all they say. His words are sweet to the hearing of the wise, more than honey and the honeycomb are to the
[383] palate. He is accounted as a god by all men, even though he be inexpert in his speech, and despicable and vile in his appearance.

He who speaks contemptuously against the humble man and does not consider him an animate creature, is like one who has opened his mouth against God. And though the humble man is contemptible in his eyes, his honor is esteemed by all creation. The humble man approaches ravening beasts, and when their gaze rests upon him, their wildness is tamed. They come up to him as to their Master, wag their heads and tails, and lick his hands and feet, for they smell coming from him that same scent that exhaled from Adam before the fall, when they were gathered together before him and he gave them
Gen. 2:19 names in Paradise. This was taken away from us, but Jesus has renewed it, and given it back to us through His Coming. This it is which has sweetened the fragrance of the race of men.

Again, the humble man approaches deadly creeping things, and as soon as the feel of his hand comes near and touches their body, the virulence and the harshness of their deadly venom ceases; and he crushes them in his hands as if they were locusts. He approaches men, and they pay heed to him as to the Lord. And why do I say men? For even the demons with all their fierceness, their bitterness, and all their boastful thinking, become like dust as soon as they come before him. All their wickedness becomes folly, and their stratagems are undone, and their wiles and pernicious cunning are rendered powerless.

So now, since we have shown the greatness of humility's God-given honor, and the power hidden in it, let us also show what humility is, and when a man is deemed worthy of receiving it perfectly as it truly is. But let us make a distinction between him that is humble in countenance, and the man who has been deemed worthy of true humility.

Humility is a certain mysterious power which perfected saints receive when they have completed the whole course of their discipline. This strength is given only to those who, by the power of grace, have accomplished all virtue in themselves, in so far as the limits of nature permit; for this virtue includes all in itself. Therefore one cannot deem every man humble without discrimination, but only those who have been accounted worthy of this degree which we have mentioned.

Not everyone who is naturally gentle, or quiet, or prudent, or meek, has attained to the stature of humility. But he is truly humble of mind who possesses in secret something worthy of pride, and does not pride himself, but in his thought reckons it as dust, earth, and ashes. And neither do we call the man humble who humbles himself through remembrance of his sins and transgressions, and who recalls them until his heart is contrite, and his mind descends from its thoughts of pride by the remembrance of them, although this is a laudable thing. For he still possesses the thoughts of pride, and has not acquired humility, but brings the latter near to himself by means of devices. Though this is laudable, as I have said, yet lo, humility is [384] still not his: nay, he seeks for it, and it is not his.

But the man of perfect humility is he who has no need of devising reasons with his mind in order to be humble, but who has come to possess it in all these matters perfectly, naturally and without labor, like a man who has received in himself some great gift, more excellent than the whole of creation and nature. Yet with his own eyes he sees himself as a sinner, vile, and contemptible. He is like a man that enters into the mysteries of all the natures of the spiritual realms, and being perfect in the wisdom of all creation in all exactness, yet considers himself as one who knows not so much as a single thing. Not by means of devices, but without compelling himself he has become such a man in his heart.

Question Is it possible, then, for a man to become such a one? Could nature thus change him?

Answer No, but do not doubt. For the power to bear mysteries which the humble man has received, which makes him perfect in every virtue without toil, this is the very power which the blessed apostles received in the form of fire. For its sake the Saviour 'com- Acts 2:3 manded them not to depart from Jerusalem' until they should receive Ibid. 1:4 power from on high, that is to say, the Paraclete, which, being interpreted, is the Spirit of consolation. And this is the Spirit of divine visions. Concerning this it is said in divine Scripture: 'Mysteries are revealed to the humble.' The humble are accounted worthy of re- Ecclus. 3:19 ceiving in themselves this Spirit of revelations Who teaches mysteries. On this account it has been said by certain holy men that humility perfects the soul through divine visions. Therefore let no man be so

audacious as to think concerning himself, that he has attained to the stage of humility within himself because of a single compunctionate thought which rises in him on some occasion, or through the few tears that he sheds, or because of one good quality that he has by nature or has gained for himself by force. For [*in such a case*] he would acquire in a short time with slight labors that which is the fullness of all mysteries and the citadel of all virtues, and he would consider these things to be the gift of humility.

But if a man overcomes all hostile spirits, and of all the works of virtue, not one escapes him, nor is there any which he himself has not worked or acquired; and if when he has overcome and subjugated all the strongholds of the enemy he becomes aware in the spirit that he has received this gift in himself (when 'the Spirit beareth witness with
Rom. 8:16 his spirit,' according to the Apostle's words): then this is the perfec-
[385] tion of humility. Blessed is he that has gained it, because at every moment he kisses and embraces the bosom of Jesus!

But if a man asks: 'What shall I do? How shall I acquire it? By what manner of means shall I become worthy of receiving it? Behold, I force myself, and as soon as I think that I have gained it, I see that, lo, thoughts opposed to it are whirling about in my mind. And immediately, I fall thereby into despair.'

To him who asks this, it will be answered: 'It is enough for the dis-
Matt. 10:25 ciple that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his lord.' Behold Him Who commanded this, and Who bestows the gift, how He possessed it: imitate Him, and you will find it. For He Himself said, 'The
John 14:30 prince of this world cometh, and he hath nothing in Me.' Do you see how, through the perfection of all virtues, humility can be gained? Let us imitate Him Who gave the commandment, 'The foxes have holes,' He says, 'and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of
Matt. 8:20 man hath not where to lay His head,' the same Who is glorified by all who have been perfected and sanctified and consummated in all generations, together with the Father that sent Him forth, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

EXTREME HUMILITY

Appendix A

Additional Homilies by Saint Isaac the Syrian
From the Syriac Printed Text

I

*On the different kinds of revelations and [divine] workings given to the saints in images and likenesses**

THE RANK OF REVELATION is something different from that which a man, by means of the investigation of wisdom and the effort of his mind, achieves by deep penetration of thought regarding a certain consideration, and the searching-out and insight into a matter through the mind's absorption in such things. For revelation is called the motionlessness of the mind, and a man does not by human diligence and reflection devise some image for the discovery of knowledge, but it comes by a spiritual working, when he to whom the revelation is given is at that moment aware neither of any thought in his soul, nor of any of those things before his senses, nor does he have anything to do with them or even know of them.

And this we say not of our own opinion, but it can be fully demonstrated from the writings of the prophets who, at the times that revelations were given them, because of their awestruck wonder, were in that hour without anything pertaining to our usual state and the employment of voluntary thoughts, or a perception of anything before them, but their mind was wholly gathered up in those things alone that were shown to them in their revelation, as it came to pass with the blessed Peter when he hungered and went up onto the roof
Acts 10 to pray: when that revelation came upon him, at that moment he was not even aware of his hunger, but the very remembrance of food was blotted out of his mind by that awestruck wonder, as the Scripture says.

* This is Homily 19 in the Syriac printed text, and in content it parallels Homilies 22 and 23 of the present edition (Homilies 20–22 in the Syriac printed text).

And one can properly learn the distinctions among all these things from the writing of that luminary of the whole world, the blessed Bishop Theodore.[1] For he speaks of the kinds and ranks of revelations especially in these books: on the three volumes on Genesis, and in the two on Job, and in the last one on the Twelve [*minor prophets*], and in the commentary on the Acts and on Matthew.

The Scripture speaks of six kinds of revelations: One, that [*apprehended*] BY THE SENSES; two, IN A VISION TO THE SOUL; three, BY THE RAPTURE OF THE MIND; four, BY THE RANK OF THE PROPHETIC OFFICE; five, IN SOME WAY APPREHENDED WITH THE MIND; and six, AS IT WERE IN A DREAM.

Those APPREHENDED BY THE SENSES are divided into two categories: revelation by means of the elements, and those given without matter. By the elements [*are wrought revelations*] such as that of the bush, and in the cloud, and in the tablets, and the rest, which were also visible to the people [*of Israel*]; and such as the marvellous things that are daily wrought throughout the world, of which the saints, through revelations, apprehend the causes and the essences, so that even deeds and actions and things hidden or afar off are revealed to men at the time they are wrought and come to pass.

[*Revelations that come to pass*] without matter are those such as the instance of the men who appeared to Abraham, and Jacob's ladder, and the revelation concerning the temporal tabernacle – 'And look that thou make them after the pattern, which was showed thee in the mount,' with others like these; and such as that divine light of exalted brightness that flashed upon Paul on the road [*to Damascus*] and blinded his eyes. Now it is obvious that even if this revelation was visible and was received through the senses, so that even those with him saw and heard, yet it was not a material revelation, nor was it a natural and elemental light, even as the Blessed Interpreter commenting upon it in the Acts makes known in his commentary on the passage, where it says, 'And those who travelled with Paul in the way stood still in amazement, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.' And he explains 'in amazement' by saying that in silence and without speech, they were seized with uncertainty, because they had a perception of the voice that spoke to him, and they saw as much as they were able

Exod. 25:40

Acts 9:3

Ibid. 9:7

1. Theodore of Mopsuestia. See Introduction, pp. 79–80.

the light that appeared to him, lest Saul be afterwards supposed to have falsely invented what had come to pass for him, since none of those with him had either seen it or heard it; but to none of them was the vision [*granted*]; for they saw not Jesus, because, as I have said, that light which appeared was not perceptible by the senses. For a kind of perception not apprehended in an incorporeal way was given him by divine working, in the form of a vision of light, so that he thought that Heaven had been opened, and so forth. Such are the revelations that have come to pass through the senses of the body, though they are higher than [*those that come to pass with*] commingling with the [*physical*] elements and those kinds of workings that are wrought through sensory and human means.

All the same, [*this grade of revelation*] does not impart the awestruck wonder of the mind to those who receive it, as does the revelation that is seen with the eyes of the soul by THE VISION OF THE SOUL, as was the case with 'I saw the Lord sitting upon a high throne,
Isa. 6:1–2 and Seraphim, each with six wings, round about Him,' and as with Ezekiel's revelation of the wheels and the astonishing forms, and the sound from within the wheels in the form of a sound resembling that of the sea, and the glorifications heard coming from the many-eyed Cherubim, which said, 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His
Ezek. 3:12 place.' How much more subtle these revelations are than those first mentioned is obvious to the enlightened. And so was that vessel that appeared to Peter and the living creatures in it, with the other things that are written. And whoever seeks it out will be able to learn these things from the Scriptures.

An example of [*revelations that come to pass*] with RAPTURE OF THE MIND is he 'who was caught up unto the third heaven, whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not; and he was caught up to Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a
2 Cor. 12:2–4 man to utter.'

There are also those of THE PROPHETIC OFFICE, such as the revelations that were given to the prophets, who foretold things to come many generations before their occurrence, as it was given even
Num. 24:1–9 to Balaam the soothsayer to speak great matters by the spirit of prophecy, things that exceeded in number even what prophets had prophesied.

Those that come IN SOME WAY APPREHENDED WITH THE MIND, are such as when the blessed Paul says, 'I pray that ye might be filled with the knowledge of God in all wisdom and in all spiritual understanding,' and 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your hearts being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of His glory in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us who believe,' and the rest of that which was given to the apostle in the revelation of knowledge of the things of the world to come, and the order of resurrection and the transformation of our human bodies, with the rest; and concerning the degree of lofty insights, and the knowledge of the divine nature, – such as 'He is the image of the invisible God,' and 'by Whom He made the ages' – 'God hath revealed [*them*] unto us by His Spirit.' And again, 'We know in part, and we understand in part,' and 'In the beginning was the Word,' and 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,' and so forth; and, 'Unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out,' and 'Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will,' and 'God hath shut up all men in disbelief, that He might have mercy on all,' and the rest. These are the apprehensions of the insights about the divine nature that were given them by the Spirit that they might know and understand them.

Col. 1:9

Eph. 1:17–19

Col. 1:15

Hebr. 1:2; 1 Cor. 2:10; 13:9

John 1:1

Matt. 16:16

Rom. 11:33

Eph. 1:11

Rom. 11:32

Those that come IN DREAMS, are such as those that came upon Abimelek, and Joseph, and Pharaoh, and Nabuchodonosor, and, 'For an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, the husband of Mary,' and so forth.

Matt. 1:20

It is also necessary to know that all the revelations that God has wrought for the instruction of men and the knowledge concerning various matters, have been through images, especially to the simple in understanding and of lesser insight into the truth; but those [*that are given*] for a man's own gladness and persuasion, and for a certain consolation and persuasion of one person alone, [*these are given*] without images, by the perception of the understanding alone. And this the Blessed Interpreter clearly shows in his second book on Job. For see how much greater than those other revelations are the things that are given in a revelation to the intelligence and understanding,

by means of the apprehending mind, and how much higher are these mysteries that are given for the instruction of all concerning God. This is perfection of knowledge.

And this also ought we to know: that revelation and the working [*thereof*] are one thing, and truth and knowledge are another, in that revelation is not the exactness of truth itself, but shows certain indications and signs in proportion to human capacity; nor are the workings and wonders of revelations said to be truth and knowledge; they are called the overshadowing of the [*divine*] working. For there is no way to learn from them anything about the foreknowledge of God, or the incomprehensibility of His nature, or the distinctions in His properties, or insight into the mysteries of His will for mankind, or the other things that are to be obtained by sound knowledge of Him. Therefore the mysteries that the understanding apprehends through insight into the divine nature are one thing, and the [*divine*] working that overshadows the mind for a time is another. And so not everyone that has had a revelation given him, or was moved with a divine working of consolation for his sake, knows God in every way, and in truth, and with exactness of knowledge; for many are they to whom such things have been given, though in the knowledge of God they were as children.

II

*On the gloomy darkness that befalls those who pursue the life of knowledge in stillness**

[387] AT A TIME OF DARKNESS, kneeling is more helpful than anything else. Indeed, the very fact that you cannot draw nigh to kneeling and persevere in it is due to the devil's warfare. It befits you to fight against this. The devil knows the help that comes from kneeling, and therefore he diligently strives with all his power to prevent you from drawing nigh to it, and when you are about to fall down upon your face, he troubles you. And even if you should overcome him and bend your knees, he will compel you not to linger in it. But even if our thoughts are cold and murky, we ought to persist long in kneeling. And although our hearts should be dead at those times and we should not even have a prayer or know what we ought

* This is Homily 49 in the Syriac printed text, and is related in theme to Homily 48 which it follows (Homily 50 of this edition).

to say, since no words of supplication come to us, nor even a petition, still we ought to remain continually prostrate upon our faces, though we keep silence.

When we are in need of help from God in some matter and are deprived of it, we rightly have not received it because we do not draw nigh to God in prayer with earnestness and fervor both day and night, loudly crying out to Him with pain; rather, we expect Him to give it to us of His own accord. He, however, contrives a cause to bring us close to Him by leaving us in tribulation. For by His very delay in coming to our rescue, He obliges us to tarry before His door in our supplications, and thus He brings about our help.

But for our part, when the causes of our being helped come upon us we are dismayed, we hesitate and give ourselves over to sloth, [388] negligence, and despondency, and we are colder than water. In every evil and temptation that comes upon you, whether from within or from without, here is the path of prayer that lies open before you: fall on your face, be it for an entire day and night, beseeching God with a fervent heart. And God, since He is merciful and good, will not delay in giving you consolation and refreshment[2] when He sees that you beseech Him with pain of heart, unless you ask in a way that lies outside the path.

Your whole life long you are to act in this manner. You will receive and you will lose. Again you will make entreaty with pain of heart and it will be given to you. And again it will go away from you, and then you will encounter such a thing that you will think that the end has come for you. But when you pray to God, once again, in a single hour it has vanished. Such is the course that has been ordained; be not disheartened.

During the time when that impenetrable darkness weighs upon the soul, let us beware of falling into despair! Hearken to me, my brother: like a woman in the pangs of childbirth and like a man enduring tortures, struggle mightily against leaving your cell! For the enemy incessantly schemes, more than for anything else, to make you leave your cell by reason of impatience at the time of combat. With all his power he compels you to go out, lest perchance while you remain indoors, you should seek refuge in kneeling. Greatly does he fear this work, more than anything else.

2. Lit. *a breathing space.*

III

*On [divine] overshadowing**

EVEN THOUGH we have spoken on this subject elsewhere, according as the place gave opportunity,[3] we do not find it tedious to explain it further here also.

Overshadowing is the name appointed to [*the divine*] succor and guardian care, and also to the receiving of a heavenly gift. As for instance, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the
Luke 1:36 Most High shall overshadow thee.' And again, 'Thy right hand, O Lord, hath overshadowed me,'[4] which is a request for help. And again, 'I will overshadow this city and save it.'[5]

Therefore we recognize two kinds of activity in the overshadowing that comes from God upon the sons of men: one [*that works*] mystically and in a manner apprehended by the intelligence, and another in outward deed.

The first pertains to holiness that is received through grace divine; that is, by the working of the Holy Spirit, a man is sanctified in his body and his soul, as in the case of Elisseus and John, and the blessed Mary, who is blessed among women – but since she is beyond compare, and above the order of created beings, let us come to that overshadowing that is given, in part, to the rest of the saints, as the members of the body.

Now the mystical kind of overshadowing, exemplified by the things given to each of the saints, is an effectual kind that overshadows the mind, and when a son of man is accounted worthy of this overshadowing, his mind is caught away with awestruck wonder and directed to some divine revelation. And for however long that working overshadows his mind, the man, through communion with the Holy Spirit, is beyond the moving of the thoughts of the soul. This is that which is spoken of by the Apostle under the form of a prayer [*in his epistle*] to the Ephesians, when he wished to make this mystery known to them, and said, 'The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Fa-

* Homily 54 in the Syriac printed text.

3. E.g. in Homily I of this Appendix; see last paragraph, p. 544.

4. Ps. 137:7(8) in the Peshitta. The Septuagint has 'Thy right hand hath *saved* me.'

5. 4 Kgs. 19:34 and Isa. 37:35 in the Peshitta. The Septuagint and King James have 'I will *defend* this city.'

ther of Glory, give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, and enlighten the eyes of your hearts.' And what comes of this? 'That ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints, and what the abundance of the greatness of His power in us who believe.' Eph. 1:17–19

This is one mystical kind of overshadowing – that when this power overshadows a man, he is deemed worthy of the glory of that new world by means of a revelation. This is that inheritance that fell to the saints in light, of which the blessed Paul speaks, of which they were Col. 1:12 counted worthy who received from the Spirit the sanctification of the mind through their holy and virtuous way of life.

The other kind of overshadowing is that whose working is made known in outward deed. It is an intelligible power that continually covers and cherishes a man, and drives away from him any harm and unforeseen accidents, lest they approach his body or his soul. This [*power*], which is invisibly perceived by the mind, is clear and discernible to the eye of faith, and the experience of it is exceedingly well known to the saints, as it is written, 'The angel of the Lord will encamp round about them that fear Him, and will deliver them,' and Ps. 33:7 'Many are the trials of the righteous, and the Lord shall deliver them out of them all.' Ps. 33:19

IV

*On how it is right for a man's life to be set apart [from the world]**

To the degree that a man draws nigh to this world in his way of life, the love of material things takes root in him. He is constantly disturbed by concern over them, and because of them he strives with other men, and he is senselessly captivated by friendship for particular persons.

But when his mind progresses in subtle reflection upon the world to come, an imageless meditation constantly stirs within him. In hope he eagerly awaits those things which he does not see, oblivious of things here. From time to time he even forgets himself, being immersed in these intellections, and disregarding his thoughts concerning visible things. Thus he despises both thought and deed as long as [389]

* Homily 56 in the Syriac printed text.

he attends to this. The confused affection that involves us in face-to-face familiarity is blotted out of him, and that love alone that does not depend on seeing [*others*] is fixed in his soul. The memory's awareness of human affairs is gradually stolen away from his mind, and meditation upon hidden things increases in him, gains strength, and vanquishes corporeal thoughts, and henceforth he withdraws from corruptible things in so far as nature is able. If it were not that natural recollection arouses him whenever he lacks something indispensable, for the greater part of the time his mind would be gathered up in those things that are to come, through the meditation upon them that has abounded in him. And on their account he becomes a fool to all the wisdom of this world, and the memory of him wanes away, and he is accounted a dullard by the standard of human knowledge.

Blessed is the man who has been accounted worthy of these things! Tears will not cease from his eyes when he returns to himself through the recollection of those things by which men are led astray, and of why they are permitted, and that in them the entirety of mankind is gathered up, and what labor and what delusion exist on their account. It is said of Paul that because such thoughts as these reigned in his soul, for the space of three years he was unable to still the tears that
Acts 20:31 welled up in him. This thought, together with the being moved with tears, takes possession of a man when he perceives the hope that is to come, and he turns in his mind to the things of this world, and to how short a man's life is, compared with the hope reserved for the ages in the new life. Through this mourning he becomes dead to all transitory things and anxiety over them, and all the passions of the soul and body die in him.

Let us remember this, my beloved, and let us despise things here inasmuch as we are able, for thus in our thoughts we shall draw nigh little by little to those things that are to come. If a man does not constrain himself in the beginning, and from time to time despise what lies before his eyes, so that he may gradually forsake these things and so proceed forward, the meditation and reflection of future things increasing within him, then he will never rise above his body in his way of life. For if those who travel on the road do not go forward day by day, shortening their journey – but on the contrary stand in one place – the road before them will never diminish, and they will never arrive

at their destination. So it is with us also. If we do not constrain ourselves little by little, we shall never have the strength to abstain from bodily things so as to gaze toward God.

Here is wisdom: because it is so difficult for a man to break away from bodily things once he is ensnared by any one of them, he should strive not to come near them. In this manner a man will also decrease [390] his thoughts of them and his mind will – because of the decrease of its cares – have leisure to gaze toward something else. I do not mean, however, that we should not have concern for our needs, for this is necessary, lest we deprive our nature of life itself. Still we should not make this our principal work and put the work of God in second place. Rather, attending to the former in part, we should leave the care of this matter to God, for it is better to place our confidence in God than in ourselves.

But if a man should venture totally to despise earthly things for the sake of spiritual ones, I would not consider this a disgraceful thing, since we have so many encouragements from Scripture that teach us to be strong in our hope. It is written, 'The Lord is at hand, have care for nothing,' and David says, 'Cast thy care upon the Lord and He Phil. 4:5–6 will nourish thee,' and, 'Rich men have turned poor and gone hungry, Ps. 54:25 but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good thing.' Ps. 33:10 Our Lord has also commanded us and said, 'Have care for nothing, but increase your solicitude for the things to come, and ye shall not lack these earthly things which are so necessary by reason of the demands of nature.' Matt. 6:31, 33

May God by His grace grant us that the love of Him abound in us, so that through continual solicitude for Him we may forget the world and the things thereof, being released from its bonds! And instead of these many bonds, may He grant us to be bound with that single bond which is never loosed from those who love Him, that is to say, the bond of the Kingdom of the worlds on high! May we be bound by this bond and be accounted worthy of the mystery of those good things, the fullness of which is reserved in the world to come for those who have attained it[6] here! May we also possess it and be possessed by it, through the power that proceeds from it, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

6. I.e. the *mystery* or a foretaste.

V

On the workings of grace *

SET THIS STANDARD continually in your soul and make proof of it: whenever you perceive within you that God's care has begun to reveal itself to your soul, then understand from this that you are near to the haven of purity, for when a man begins to be elevated above the passions, this holy power immediately cleaves to
[391] his soul and does not depart from her either by night or by day, and it shows to her God's providence.

And even the minutest details of all that is and was, of yes and no, of what visits a man both secretly and openly, and of the very creation of the world, this power which has entered the soul reveals to her. And further, it reveals to her God's creative power and shows her His divine care which unceasingly cleaves to and visits every single thing of this creation. And it shows to his soul how divine care accompanies a man at all times, though he is unaware and ignorant of it, and preserves him from adversities at all times, and directs him toward that which is for his salvation and the repose of both his soul and body and for the gaining of life. This very same divine power, which works all these things, manifests itself to a man in secret through noetic revelation to his spiritual nature, that is, his mind. When a man is deemed worthy to receive this power in his soul, he knows naught but awe and silence; his tears flow like streams at every hour and thenceforth the man desists from all works.

From henceforth you will gaze at all times upon the spectacle of God's continuous care for the work of His hands. Thereupon your understanding will be swallowed up in awestruck wonder, your senses will be silent, and you, the wretched man, will cast yourself down upon your face in prayer, your tongue being unable to speak, and your heart unequal to offering a prayer; for by wonder at these divine workings even prayer falls idle. This is the idleness that is superior to work, when a man is completely at rest from his senses and thoughts and he lies continually upon his face before his Lord. And in this supposed idleness, even his bones by their very silence will send up glorification unto God, as the prophet says, 'All my bones shall say,
Ps. 34:11 Lord, O Lord, who is like unto Thee?'

* Homily 71 in the Syriac printed text.

At this time you will find that the demon of pride, more than all other passions, is bound and cast beneath the feet of your soul. By this gift, as they say, a man is deemed worthy of the love of God and perfect humility.

This gift is first tasted through stillness, and those who with labor[7] and watchfulness persevere in absolute stillness cannot but know it. But when a man departs from stillness and embraces laxity, it withdraws from him. When, however, he enters stillness once again, is mindful of his soul and vigorously takes up his customary labor, it reaches out again to his soul and manifests to her its power. Once, therefore, a man becomes completely perfect, this power cleaves to him both inwardly and outwardly, and he will not pause even for an hour from sighing and weeping and the rest, provided that he does not spring away from the vigilant order of his labor.

Even now there are men who have been accounted worthy of this gift in part. But from this portion that they have received, they understand the properties of that which is the perfection of this gift. For when a man tastes a ladleful of wine from a large wine-bowl, he knows [392] what all the rest is like, even though others should drink it partly or completely.

A man who possesses this gift in perfection will not readily be found, nay, scarcely at all. For this power is a gift of the watchfulness of stillness; and because there is no one in our dispirited generation who has embraced perfect stillness and complete watchfulness, we are also devoid of its gifts. The man who possesses these indications in writings of ink, but in actual deed has not found them through his experience, resembles the man who carries under his arm a lyre adorned and furnished with strong strings, but his fingers do not know, being untrained, how to play them and to produce diverse melodies for the delight of his soul, and possesses only the lyre, and not its art. He has need of other men to play it before him and give him pleasure.

Do not rejoice when you grow rich in the knowledge of many things, but rejoice when that which you know is found to be yours by the actual doing of it. The former without the latter will gradually recede, and it can even produce pride because it goes unpractised. When, however, you are diligent in the latter,[8] without study you will

7. Or *righteous activity, praxis.* 8. I.e. the practising of what one knows.

certainly be illumined in the former also. The eye of knowledge is experience, and its fostering is continual labor.

This will be for you a clear sign of your soul's limpid purity: when, after thoroughly examining yourself, you find that you are full of mercy for all mankind, and that your heart is afflicted by the intensity of your pity for men and burns as with fire, without making distinctions between persons. By this, when it is continually present, the image of the heavenly Father will be seen in you.

Matt. 5:45, 48

You will be able to recognize the measure of your way of life not from the distinctive quality of your works, but from the variations that your understanding undergoes. The body is wont to bathe in tears when the mind beholds spiritual things, for then without compulsion and without willing it, tears run from a man's eyes as from torrents, drenching his cheeks.

I myself know a man who even during sleep was seized by awestruck wonder at God through *theoria* on something from the material of his evening's reading. And while his soul was astonished at the meditation of this divine vision, he perceived as it were that for a long time he was dwelling upon the thoughts of his sleep and delving into the marvel of that vision. It was, indeed, in the very deep of night when suddenly he awoke from his sleep, his tears flowing like water and falling even to his chest. His mouth was filled with glorifications and his heart mused long upon that divine vision with sweet-
[393] ness that knew no satiety. From the abundance of his tears, which without measure were shed from his pupils, and from the stupefaction of his soul, whereby all the members of his body became limp, and of his heart, wherein a certain sweetness throbbed, he was not even able to perform his usual liturgy of night prayer. Only with difficulty could he utter a psalm at daybreak, so overwhelmed was he by the multitude of his tears which gushed involuntarily from the fountains of his eyes, and by the other things.

Let us also be diligent, my brethren, and long before we are minded to go to sleep, let us ponder upon the glorifications and our psalm-singing and our readings from the holy Scriptures, keeping our soul from evil recollections and from every odious reflection, and let us furnish our treasury with every sort of beautiful thing. Then sleep will overtake us while we are full of the recollection of God, and our

soul will be aflame with much ardent longing for things that are good; because God's grace surrounds us in our sleep and pours forth upon us its gifts, even when we slumber, while examining us, whether our body is pure of every kind of defilement and whether the thoughts of our heart are cleansed from odious things. On account of grace the sons of the prince of darkness cannot draw near us or surround us, for the sword and spear of grace encircle us. But if they find us as they would like – when grace has withdrawn far from us, as it were abhorring us, and has driven our soul away from itself as though we were corpses estranged from life – then they draw nigh to us with all their wickedness, and they ply us with all kinds of foul and terrifying thoughts according to the desire of their loathsome will.

When, therefore, something of this sort befalls us in our sleep, we should understand it immediately and recollect ourselves and perceive that in this night God's overshadowing was far from us. How was it that the demons did not swallow us up? It was God's bidding alone, in Whose hand is the soul of all flesh, that permitted them to come near us so that we might become vigilant and take heed of our soul. But it is impossible for them to approach when God's overshadowing is near us.

VI [394]

*On hidden states, and the powers and operations therein**

My brother, may this be regarded by you as true. God always inclines to a man's will, beholding his purpose and his earnest desire, and He grants his request and satisfies him when it concerns the following: the performance of wondrous deeds, the foreknowing of things to come, deliverance from temptations, peace from warfare, victory over each of the passions, the attaining of each of the virtues, grace-given consolation for a time, purity of prayer, fervor of spirit, spiritual joy, and all the other requests for the sake of which a man toils at various times, having a good intention and a mournful heart.

But as regards the mysteries that belong to the Spirit, as being the motions of spiritual prayer, and the mind's entrance within the veil of the Holy of Holies, and the perception of that imperishable inheri-

* Homily 75 in the Syriac printed text.

tance: unless a man pays their tribute, God will not be persuaded to give them, even if all creation were to make entreaty for him. Now their tribute is purity of soul. When a man attains to purity from the passions, then things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have
1 Cor. 2:9 gone up into the heart of a man that he should ask for them in prayer, are revealed to him through purity, which does not desist even for a moment from mysteries and spiritual visions.

What the power of spring customarily does to the earth's nature, this grace also does to the soul through purity. The power of springtime causes even the delicate roots that grow in the valleys to sprout, warming the earth as a fire does a cauldron, so that it sends forth the treasures of verdure that God has planted in the earth's nature to gladden creation and for His own glory. In like manner grace causes the manifest blossoming of all the splendor that God has concealed in the soul's nature, and it shows this to her and causes her to rejoice in its beauty.

So it is that when the soul beholds the great and ineffable treasures that God has laid up within her, that were hidden from her by the polluted garment of the passions and of ignorance, but which God now shows to her because the coat of the passions is torn asunder, then from her joy she is carried away from earthly things by His love. No
[395] longer does she remember the flesh that concealed her own beauties from her sight. She then beholds in herself heavenly beauties as in a perfect mirror, one that through its absolute purity reflects the beauty of men's faces. For holiness is meet for the holy. Every kind of virtue you can name, and every labor by which righteousness is accomplished, can be practised, acquired, and perfected outside of stillness; but dispassion and purity cannot be acquired outside of stillness.

VII

*Brief subjects**

THE BLESSED PAUL TEACHES US, saying, 'Put off the old man and put on the new man which after God is created in
Eph. 4:22, 24 holiness and the righteousness of truth.'

Now he does not say, 'Put on the new man over the old man,' for he knew that this would be impossible. See how wisely he enjoins

* Homily 76 in the Syriac printed text.

this. He does not say, 'Put on the new man who is renewed by the knowledge of God,' but he says, 'First put off the old, then put on the new.' This is like what he says definitively in another place, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.' By 'incorruption' he means the knowledge of that other world, and by 'corruption' and 'flesh and blood' he designates the corrupting passions of both the soul and the body, the realm of whose motions is in the 'mind of the flesh.' He calls purity here the 'new man,' and by the 'Kingdom of God' he means the lofty noetic *theoria* of the blessed perceptions of those eternal effulgences, into which the holy soul is only permitted to enter by means of incorruptible perceptions that are exalted above corruption, flesh, and blood.

1 Cor. 15:50

Rom. 8:6

If the little pupil of your soul's eye has not been purified, do not venture to gaze at the sun, lest you be deprived of your normal visual power and you be cast into one of those noetic realms, that is to say, Tartarus, which is a type of Sheol: I mean, darkness outside of God. For those who go outside their nature by means of the thoughts of their intellects roam in that region by means of the intellectual nature which they possess.[9] Therefore the man who dared to enter the wedding feast in unclean garments was commanded to be cast into this outer darkness. By 'wedding feast' the vision of spiritual knowledge is meant. The dishes of that feast are the plenitude of divine mysteries, which are full of rejoicing, jubilation, and delight of soul. He calls a 'wedding garment' the mantle of purity, whereas 'unclean garments' are passionate thoughts[10] that work defilement in the soul. The 'outer darkness' is to be outside of any delight of knowledge of the truth and intimacy with God. If the man who is clothed in garments such as these dares with his understanding to imagine the exaltedness of God, to enter and sit his soul down in the midst of the spiritual divine visions of that holy wedding feast (which shines forth only in the pure), and to desire to partake of its pleasure while he is engrossed in the pleasure of the passions, he is suddenly swallowed up as it were by phantasies[11] and driven away from there into a region devoid of splendor, the same which is called Sheol and Perdition. This place is ignorance and being forgotten by God.

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Matt. 22:11–13

9. Here St. Isaac is speaking of philosophers, intellectuals, atheists, and the like.

10. Or *motions*.

11. Or *mirages*, i.e. of the truth.

The things of God, it is said, come of themselves, if the place is pure and undefiled.[12] The words 'come of themselves' mean that it is natural for purity that the heavenly light shines in it without searching and labor on our part. Within a pure heart, the new heaven is stamped, for the sight thereof is light, and the place thereof is spiritual. And it is said in another place that as the magnet has the natural power to attract particles of iron, so spiritual knowledge attracts a pure heart.

Although it has been handed down by truly trustworthy men that no one's mind is absolutely invulnerable to the plundering of the passionate allurements of this present life, still I say with confidence, not fearing to be convicted by the truth of experience, that the man who is clothed with the raiment of mourning in his thinking is not only invincible to the allurements of the passions, but he is mighty and triumphant in the war against them. Indeed, they do not venture at all to show themselves for battle, nor even to try their various devices from afar, wherever there is a mourning soul that has made herself a house of lamentation with her manifold mournings for her sins. And as the blessed Jacob said, she will make her dwelling in the grave until
Gen. 37:35 she meets her beloved Joseph again. I cannot be persuaded, therefore, that where there is the bitterness of mourning, the aforementioned pleasure of the passions can enter. I affirm rather that this man's labor is in security and safety and lies above fear. The man who continually mourns because of fear – that is, because he does not know what the final end of his course will be – is superior to the man who continually passes his life in joy because he perceives here the hope of his labor.

O man, whose city is downtrodden by inner passions, take up the weapon of mourning and pursue them and wrest your sons from
Gen. 14:14–16 their hands! For this weapon is invincible and reliable on all occasions, and is known from experience by men worthy of trust.

12. See also p. 124.

Appendix B

*The First Syriac Epistle of Saint Macarius of Egypt**

ABBA MACARIUS writes to all his beloved sons, exhorting and greeting them before all else. When a man wishes to know himself, to seek God, and to repent of what he has done in the time when he was heedless, God by His grace gives him sorrow over his former deeds.

2. Hereafter God, in His tender mercy, gives him bodily hardship through fasting and vigil, through a multitude of many prayers and renunciation of the world. And He grants him to bear abuse, to despise bodily comforts, and to love weeping more than laughter.

3. After this a man is given mourning, weeping, humility of heart and of body, and the ability not to see another man's failings, but only his own. Further he is granted to recollect the day of his departure from this world and how he must needs come before God, to have always before his eyes the torments to come, and to have depicted before his heart the glory and honor which those who love God will receive.

4. But though God delights him with these things, He also puts him once more to the test, whether he will abstain from his own wishes and will stand up against things that make war with his heart, the same which formerly defeated him. Then he will be given the ability to vanquish the pleasure of diverse foods which make the heart impotent, such that he cannot complete his brief fast. The demons set before a man's eyes the weakness of his body and the length of the time, saying: 'How long can you endure this labor? Your body is weak, and great labor is required of a man to have God dwelling in him, and especially in you, who have committed many sins. How many of these will God forgive you?'

5. But if they surmise that his heart has not accepted their words,

* Translated from the Syriac text ed. by W. Strothmann in *Die syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios* I (Wiesbaden, 1981), pp. 74–84. See the Introduction, p. 109.

they come again to the man under various pretexts of righteousness, saying, 'Although you have sinned, you repented of your sins.' Then they cause him to remember certain men who sinned and did not repent, thus sowing vainglory in his soul.

6. Not only this do they do, but they also cause men to give him empty honor. They advise him to undertake works that surpass his strength to bear, sowing in his heart thoughts of asceticism, vigil, and of many other things that are outside due order, which I am unable to enumerate, and they represent to him that they are easily accomplished. This they do hoping to be able by these things to turn him aside, as it is said in the Proverbs, 'Turn not aside, neither to the right
Prov. 4:27 hand nor to the left.'

7. Now if the good God sees that a man's heart has not inclined to any of these things (as David said, indicating the same, 'Thou hast proved my heart, Thou hast visited it in the night, Thou hast tried me
Ps. 16:3 by fire, and unrighteousness was not found in me'), then God will help him and deliver him. Why does he say 'in the night' and not 'in the day'? Because the enemy's deceptions are a night, as Paul also
1 Thess. 5:5 said, 'We are not children of the night, but children of the day,' since the Son of God is the Day, but Satan is night.

8. But if the heart passes through these warfares, the demons begin to war against him with fornication and lust for men. By these conflicts the heart is weakened, such that the work of preserving chastity seems extremely difficult to him and he thinks that he will be unable to do it. They beset him with the length of time and the toil of this virtue, saying, 'There is much work in preserving this,' and they bring bodily infirmity upon him.

9. If the heart is frightened by these things, and is enfeebled by these warfares, then the merciful God sends to him a holy power and steadies his heart. God gives him weeping, consolation, and repose of heart, such that he becomes stronger than his enemies and they dare not afflict him, being afraid of the power that dwells in him.[1] This also Paul says, 'Strive, and ye shall receive power.' This is the power concerning which Peter spoke, saying, 'An inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you,
1 Pet. 1:4–5 who are kept by the power of God through faith.'

1. Cf. St. Isaac, p. 322.

10. Afterward, when the good God sees that a man's heart has been strengthened against the enemy, He takes away the [*aforesaid*] power from time to time. He permits that enemies be loosed upon him to strive with him through licentiousness, the pleasures of the eyes, vainglory, and pride. Thus a man becomes like a ship without a rudder drifting and striking hither and thither.

11. Now when the heart is weakened and enervated by these things, the good God once again cares for His creation and sends him again that holy power. Thus he braces his heart, soul, body, and the [453] rest of his members under the yoke of the Comforter, as our Lord said, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.' Matt. 11:29

12. Then the good God begins to open the eyes of a man's heart to enable him to know that He is the man's Helper.[2] Hereafter the man knows to render honor unto God with much humility and with a contrite spirit, as David says, 'A sacrifice unto God is a humble spirit.'[3] For it is by the labors of these warfares that the heart acquires humility and contrition.

13. Then this power begins to reveal heavenly things before the heart, and how one should chant hymns, and what future honors are to be received by those who have persevered. It reveals to him that however many labors a man accomplishes, they are small in comparison with that which God will bestow on him, as the Apostle says in Scripture, 'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.' Further this Rom. 8:18 power begins to reveal the torments of those who are tormented and many other things whereof I cannot now speak, because it is not the time to speak of them all.

14. Then the Comforter sets rules for the heart of the pure soul, such that a man places himself beneath all creation, such that he does not look at the iniquities of men, that he looks straight ahead with his eyes, that he keeps guard over his tongue, that he stretches out his foot straight before him and applies his hands to righteousness, that he abides continually in prayer, that he is humble of body, and that he is persistent in vigil. These He places in a man with measure and discernment; not with confusion, but with good order.

2. Lit. *Supporter.*

3. Ps. 50 (51):17 in the Peshitta.

15. If, however, the mind despises these commandments and rules of the Spirit, the [*holy*] power forsakes the man. Then the heart will undergo warfare and confusion, and the passions of the body will trouble him through the motions sown by his enemies.

16. But if the heart turns back and lays hold of the commandments of the Spirit given in a man's behalf, then he will know that constant continuance with God is itself his rest, even as David said, 'I cried
Ps. 29:2 unto Thee, and Thou hast healed me.'

17. Yet it is my opinion that unless a man acquires great humility in his heart and his body, reckons himself as nothing, sets reproach at naught, constrains himself, holds death before his eyes day in and day out, and renounces all fleshly things, he cannot lay hold of the commandments of the Spirit.

Understanding cannot enter you unless you practise stillness. Still-
[454] ness gives birth to offspring amid afflictions. Afflictions beget diligence. Diligence begets weeping. Weeping begets fear. Fear begets humility. Humility begets a man's vision of God. Vision begets love. And love begets health of soul. Whoever wishes to enter into these good things must pray without ceasing, prepare his soul for death, weep and mourn, determine what separates him from God and desist from it, and must hate the world and all that is in it. Then God's grace will gladly receive him.

*The First Syriac Epistle of Saint Macarius of Alexandria On the Christian Discipline**

1. The Christian should estrange himself from the sin aroused in any of his members and be joined to all the members of righteousness. If a man's eye and his vision are sound, but his foot or hand is injured, then two of his members will be healthy, but illness will be present in the others. Such a man does not enjoy the perfect health of his entire body. Therefore the Christian should gain health in all his members.

A Christian's secret, his knowledge, and his discipline are alien to this world, and for this reason most men do not know them. Christi-

* Translated from the Syriac text ed. by W. Strothmann in *Die syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios* 1, pp. 132–52. In the MSS this epistle bears different titles, one of which is 'The Twelfth Syriac Epistle of Saint Macarius of Egypt.'

anity is something alien to the artisans, the builders, the merchants, and the philosophers which one sees in the world. Now suppose there was a great city all of whose inhabitants were from the same great lineage, all princes or all rich men, but it happened that each of them was dispersed into a different province. The inhabitants of those regions would consider them barbarians, whereas they alone would be able to recognize each other on sight and to know that they spoke the same language and were citizens of the same city. In like manner Christians are citizens of a city which is alien to this world. They are citizens of a different age, their wisdom is different, the Spirit which dwells in them is lofty, their lineage is heavenly, their riches permanent, their worth everlasting. Their will is concordant with their Lord's. Their mind is that of Christ. They are sons of light, sons of the bridal chamber, sons of rest, sons of the New Testament. 1 Cor. 2:16

2. The new language of things that are everlasting and imperishable is very different. Take a king or a philosopher of this world: will he be conversant with faith through the language of life, will he partake of true wisdom which is more lofty than heaven and earth? Who of such men could truly know in word and deed that all visible things in this world are mirages that delude the eyes? For a man cannot turn away from the world and enter into true life until he has journeyed through rugged passages. [455]

As mist weighs down upon the air, so the power of sin filled Adam's heart. It also lies like smoke upon our will. Although the lovers of truth wage war against this smoke, they do not become partakers of the good part immediately, but only through much exercise and sweat. They are superior to those who do not struggle at all. When, however, they receive a little rest, they become puffed up with pride and suppose that they have reached freedom and perfection, not perceiving that they have been deluded.

Nothing is so destructive to a Christian as pride. Through pride the serpent found the occasion to beguile Adam with the promise that he would become a god. Even 'God resisteth the proud.' But the true sign of a Christian is the following: to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, to endure hunger and thirst, to be poor in spirit, humble and contemptible in one's own eyes, and for a man to beseech God both day and night that he might stand firmly in the truth. But if it Gen. 3:5 Jas. 4:6

should seem to someone that he is satiated, wealthy, and in need of nothing, he partakes of the portion of delusion. The Apostle censures
1 Cor. 4:8 men of this sort when he says, 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich,' and
Luke 6:24 again, 'Woe unto you that are rich,' and unto all who think them-
Gal. 2:6 selves to be something.

3. Changes occur in every man even as they do in the atmosphere. One moment there is cold, and soon after, burning heat, and then perhaps hail, and after a little, fair weather. This is the manner in which we are trained: now there is warfare, now grace comes to our aid. Sometimes a man's soul is found in a tempest and violent waves rise up against her; and sometimes a change occurs and she is helped by grace, she is filled with joy of heart, peace of God, and chaste and peaceful thoughts. If it should happen that after these things, grievous occurrences press upon us, we ought not to be sorrowful; and likewise, at a time of grace-given rest, we ought not to boast. But in a time of joy let us expect affliction, and in a time of affliction let us expect help. In this manner our path is made smooth. But the man who deviates from it will be prey for wolves.

4. Do not marvel, O sagacious man, if you suffer affliction from persons who dwell with you, for you know that this is the work of the demons. Caiaphas, who crucified our Lord, sat on the seat of Moses,
Matt. 23:2 the seat which our Lord greatly honored. And the prophets were also persecuted by members of their own race. The high priesthood of Moses passed over to our Lord and from Him to the chief of the apostles, and from Peter to the Church of God, since the true priesthood
[456] belongs to the Church. Now the Church bestows the baptism of fire
Matt. 3:11 and Spirit and the circumcision of the heart, whereupon the heavenly
Rom. 2:29 Spirit rests, and He dwells in the mind.

As long as we are in this body, we should not be without struggle (like a man who has no cares), because our faculty of free will is in subjection to fear until we reach our eternal city. There we shall be without labor and temptation, for yonder there is no need to be anxious and there is no affliction; there is no old age and no Satan; there is no warfare and no fear, but only rest, joy, and peace. Our Lord is called Redeemer because He gave Himself over to death in behalf of the rational nature of men and redeemed us all from captivity. He is also called Healer, because He healed us with a heavenly remedy and

cured the passions of our souls. Jesus Christ is our King and God, but Satan is a tyrant and the ruler of all our evils.

5. God and His angels call us toward life, but the evil one and his hosts desire our perdition. Lo, the soul stands between the two camps, and she becomes the possession of the side to which her will inclines. Now a father, who is about to send his son to a city by a road whereon he will encounter wild beasts, provides his son with potions that will kill the beasts which attack him. So it is in our case as well. Let us, then, take pains to receive the heavenly potion which heals us, gives us life, kills the passions, and drives away evil spirits. It is not an easy thing for a man to acquire a pure heart. This can be done only by struggle and much toil, which cleanse the heart, give a man a good conscience, and completely uproot evils from him.

6. Grace supports the heart. But if a man becomes proud, he falls, for he does not know that as long as he is in this body, the smoke of sin is with him. Therefore all the righteous have pleased God by journeying the strait and narrow path. Abraham was rich before men and Matt. 7:14
before God, yet he called himself 'dust and ashes.' And David said, 'I Gen. 18:27
am a reproach of men, the outcast of the people, a worm and not a
man.' The prophets and the apostles endured reproaches and tribula- Ps. 21:6
tions. And our Lord Himself, Who is the 'way,' did not come in His John 14:6
own behalf, but for our sake, that we might have a pattern in Him. The King and the Son of the King, God and the Son of God, humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant, being God, and He Phil. 2:7
gave us a healing remedy and healed our wounds.

7. The Jews despised Him when they saw Him in a humble aspect resembling our own, and it is painful for me to consider the moment when they cried out 'Crucify Him' as the raving people was assem- Luke 23:21
bled. The Lord of majesty was humiliated and repudiated by all. Like a malefactor He was condemned to death by the judge and was abominated by the entire people. He heard ridicule from every quar- [457]
ter, from the Pharisees and from all men. It is painful for the heart to consider how they spit in His face, crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and smote His cheeks, as it is written, 'I gave My back to scourges, and I turned not My face away from the shame of spitting and My cheeks from buffeting.' Now if God willed to accept and to Isa. 50:6
lower Himself to such sufferings, dishonors, and humiliations, then

no matter how much you humble yourself, you whose nature is mud and subject to death, you will never resemble your Lord [*in this*]. God for your sake humbled Himself, but you, for your own sake, do not humble yourself. You are proud and puffed up. God came and took up your burden to give you His rest, but you do not wish to endure labors and suffering. By your labors your wounds are healed.

8. Not every man can discern precious stones. Many owners of pearls, being devoid of discernment, do not know how great a treasure they possess. Prudent and wise men, however, know how to distinguish the value of both gold coins and counterfeit coins. Likewise among the brethren there are some whom grace accompanies although they do not know that the beckoning of grace is at work, and do not perceive from whence they are moved toward the good in their virtuous deeds, for they are not in harmony with, and do not see, what they have.

Wise men do not only pray at the time of prayer, but at all times they are diligent in prayer. For the warfare with evil is unremitting, the smoke of sin continually rises up, and like water from a spring, so thoughts well up in the soul. Be prepared to resist thoughts not only when you pray, but also during every work that you do, and even when you are sleeping. If you see a rich man in the world, immediately a thought whispers to you that he is very illustrious. But you should contradict it, saying, 'He is a corruptible being,' and then show him[4] that your concern is for eternal and imperishable riches. And if, again, a thought should point out to you a beautiful woman and instill in you lust for her, say to it: 'This is defilement which leads to destruction! Lo, the tombs are filled with the bones of the dead!' And if you see glorious things in the world, buildings and cities, you should [*reflect to*] build up your soul at all times, and your mind and will should be vigilant to contradict the sin that dwells within you.

Pray to God, saying, 'I beseech Thee, my Lord, have mercy on me!' Do this unceasingly when you are walking and when you are eating. When the good dwells in a man, prayer never ceases, because the Spirit prays continuously in him. This, however, is the stage of great and perfect men, namely, that when they are walking and when they are speaking, their prayer to God is unceasing.

4. Or *it*, i.e. the thought.

9. The tempter wishes to tempt a man and to know what he is going to do. He makes trial of him because he does not know whether [458] or not a man listens to him until the soul surrenders her will to him. Nor do we say of Satan that he knows all the thoughts of the heart. Suppose there is a tree with many branches. A man can only grasp two or three branches, but the rest escape him. In the same manner the soul has many members like branches, that is, thoughts and reflections. A few of these Satan can know, but the rest he does not even perceive.

10. In one matter sin is stronger than we are, when evil thoughts well up in us. But in another we are helped by God through our asceticism and our prayer, if with fervent love we cry out to our Lord, that He deem us worthy of bearing the fruit of love, of belief in our Lord's Gospel, of seeking Him, and of drawing nigh to Him. In the visible world a farmer tills the soil; but if rain from on high does not water it, the farmer's tillage will produce no profit from the ground. It is the same also with spiritual cultivation. Therefore a man should till the soil of his heart by toiling with his whole will, for God is pleased by a man's labors and his fruits. If, however, celestial clouds from above do not give rain and the showers of grace, a man's entire labor will be of no profit.

11. It is proper for a Christian even when he has done all he is commanded to do, all righteousness, to consider that he has done nothing. Luke 17:10 When he fasts strenuously, he should think that he does not fast; when he prays, that he is like a man who does not pray; and when he perseveres in prayer, that he is like a man who does not do so. He should fix in his soul the thought that he is only just beginning his labor and that he is not righteous before God, as a man who makes a new beginning each day. Though he despises himself, his heart is filled with hope, joy, and expectation of that Kingdom and of salvation, reflecting that, 'If today I am not redeemed on account of my sins, I shall be redeemed by grace tomorrow.' The man who plants a vineyard first reckons in his mind the harvest, the tribute he will give to the king, and the expenses he must pay from his household; then he undertakes the work. So it is also in our case. We endure the afflictions of the narrow way in hope of our salvation and that we shall be accounted worthy of eternal life. For without hope and joy, the bur-

den of labor and the hardship of tribulation and patience would weigh heavily upon us.

12. As a burning stick cannot escape from the fire, so the soul cannot escape from death except by labor. Satan is especially wont to delude us under the guise of good thoughts, and he assures us that by such things [*as he suggests*] we shall please God. Thus he deceives us and prevents us from being aware of our deception, and he catches us in his snare of destruction. It is expedient for the ascetic athlete, who strives in the contest, to enter into the thoughts of his heart and there valiantly to wage war with the devil's deception, to test the passions which Satan incites in him, to renounce even his own soul, to be an-
[459] gry with the lusts that afflict his heart and to rebuke them, to stand up and war against his thoughts, and to wrestle with himself.

13. If in physical matters you preserve your body from corruption and from outward fornication, but inwardly you commit adultery and before God's eyes you fornicate by means of your thoughts, the virginity of your body will be of no profit to you. When a virgin is cajoled and loses her virginity, she is repudiated by her bridegroom. So it is also with the soul. If in her thoughts she commits fornication with the serpent, she is repudiated by Christ, her Bridegroom. 'Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adul-
Matt. 5:28 tery in his heart.' Therefore if the mind agrees with any evil thought, the will accomplishes it. The fornication of the body is manifest, for it is wrought with women. The fornication of the soul is hidden, for the soul commits adultery with Satan through all the sinful passions. According to her own will the soul is a sister of God and His angels, or of Satan and his hosts. If through the passions she commits fornication with the demons, she will be estranged from the heavenly Bridegroom.

14. Therefore let us compel our mind to take refuge in converse with Christ. A place of stillness is like the beauty of summer. I know many men who attained to the working of miracles and were caught up to the courts of Heaven; but as those who luxuriate in the riches of grace, they set prayer at naught, and so fell to the nethermost parts of the earth and into the abyss of sin. This befell them firstly because they separated themselves from the brotherhood; secondly because they became puffed up, filled with pride, and imagined that they had

become perfect; and thirdly because they were stubborn in the ways of their own will. Then they set prayer at naught, dared to be teachers [*of others*], presumed in their own minds to have attained to something, and imagined that they alone were perfect. But when, at last, the tempest rose up against them, they were swallowed up by great waves. The man who has laid hold of the truth is truly humble. He does not judge other men, the sinner, the pagan, or the Jew, but he is vigilant in his mind's understanding, lest he become enmeshed in their works, knowing that they are cripples. Now the truth reigns in the Church, and unto her belongs the priesthood.

SAINT MACARIUS THE GREAT

Appendix C

Glossary

ABERRATION renders a Syriac word meaning *turning aside, deviation,* and more generally *mutability, susceptibility to change, inconstancy, the inability to remain in one state without change.* It is our state in this life, because we retain our free will and continue in temptations, but it will be abolished in the age to come. The holy angels are preserved from aberration by their being constantly moved to the good, God; and the demons, through their hardened pride, do not turn away from the evil choice once willingly made. The Greek most often renders it ἔκκλισις, (*turning aside*) and on occasion ροπή (*turn, inclination*) or τροπή (*turning, change*).

ANGER OR INCENSIVE FACULTY; DESIRE OR APPETITIVE FACULTY The following definition is from the Glossary of *The Philokalia,* Vol. I, p. 357 (Faber & Faber, 1979):

> APPETITIVE ASPECT OF THE SOUL, or the soul's desiring power (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν . . .): one of the three aspects or powers of the soul according to the tripartite division formulated by Plato (see his *Republic,* Book IV, 434D–441C) and on the whole accepted by the Greek Christian Fathers. The other two are, first, the intelligent aspect or power (τὸ λογιστικόν . . .); and, second, the incensive aspect or power (τὸ θυμικόν . . .), which often manifests itself as wrath or anger, but which can be more generally defined as the force provoking vehement feelings. The three aspects or powers can be used positively, that is, in accordance with nature and as created by God, or negatively, that is, in a way contrary to nature and leading to sin.

On occasion Saint Isaac refers to these faculties, although he usually refers to the appetitive and incensive faculties together without mentioning the intelligent, being less concerned with rigid adherence to a philosophical system than with using terms that fill the need at hand. He is referring to these faculties when e.g. in Homily 3 he says that 'desire and anger naturally belong to the soul.' In Homily 2 he

discusses the role of the soul's incensive and appetitive parts in accomplishing righteous activity (*praxis*) and divine vision (*theoria*) (p. 123); and in Homily 55 he associates the incensive faculty with the zeal that is necessary for the working of virtue, and the appetitive with the 'holy desire planted naturally in . . . the soul' whereby the soul conceives a desire for the good (p. 412). Again, in Homily 72 he attributes to 'our natural incensive faculty' the zeal that spurs a man to overcome obstacles to virtue (p. 506).

DISCIPLINE renders the difficult terms *dubara-dubare* / *πολιτεία*. The Syriac word means the guidance, course, or rule of one's actions, a mode of life, usually with ascetical connotations; the Greek, in patristic usage, means essentially the same. We have not distinguished between the Syriac singular and plural forms, since even scholars hesitate to do so and the Greek usually translates both by *πολιτεία*, although there is a subtle difference: *dubara* probably refers to a specific ascetical practice, whereas *dubare* means the sum of the same, i.e. an ascetical way of life.

DIVINE VISION See *Theoria*.

FAITH Saint Isaac distinguishes two kinds of faith. The first is the consent of the mind that is expressed in one's outward confession of faith in the mysteries of the Christian revelation; the second is the active presence of grace working in the purified soul to give it conviction beyond nature and the senses; and the first is a prerequisite to the second:

> By faith, we mean not that wherewith a man believes in the distinctions of the Divine and worshipful Hypostases, in the singular and unique nature of the very Godhead, and in the wondrous dispensation to mankind through the assumption of our nature, although this faith is also very lofty. But we call faith that light which dawns in the soul by grace, and which by the testimony of the mind establishes the heart in freedom from doubt through the full assurance of hope that is remote from all conceit. This faith manifests itself not by the tradition of the hearing of the ear, but with spiritual eyes it beholds the mysteries concealed in the soul, and the secret and divine riches that are hidden away from the eyes of the sons of the flesh, but are unveiled by the Spirit to those who are brought up at Christ's table in the study of His laws [pp. 400–1].

> For you have covered over your faith with unbelief (we do not mean that faith which is the basis of all men's Confession, but the noetic strength that steadies the heart by the light of the understanding, and by the testimony of the conscience rouses in the soul great confidence in God, so that she takes no thought for herself, but having no concern for anything earthly, she casts her cares on God) [p. 475].

LIFE The Syriac word meaning *life* (Gk. ζωή) is also used idiomatically for *salvation* (Gk. σωτηρία). For example when Saint Peter exhorts the men of Israel, '*Save yourselves* (σώθητε) from this untoward generation' (Acts 2:40), the Syriac Peshitta has the imperative form of the verb *live*.

In Budge's translation of *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers* from the Syriac, we find the common request of a monk seeking counsel of a respected Elder, 'Tell me a word whereby I may *live,*' whereas in the Greek it is 'may *be saved*' (σωθῶ).

The Greek translators have usually rendered it literally as ζωή (*life*) rather than σωτηρία (*salvation*) and on the whole we have followed suit. Of the score of occurrences of the word *salvation* in our English text, which renders σωτηρία when the passage is also in Greek, the corresponding Syriac word in most cases is one that might more strictly be translated *redemption, ransom*.

The idiomatic nuance of *salvation* might be borne in mind in such passages as:

> The beginning of the path of *life* . . . [p. 113]
>
> The first thought that by God's loving-kindness descends into a man, that enters into his heart and guides his soul to *life* . . . [p. 373]
>
> Glory be to Him Who deals mercifully with us both in things of the right hand and of the left, and by means of these things grants us an occasion to find *life!* [p. 415]
>
> Therefore neither should that man despair who is enmeshed in evil deeds, since it is possible for him to gain *life*, for he still lives. [p. 421]
>
> In truth, without afflictions there is no *life*. [p. 435]
>
> . . . then know that God wishes to grant you a certain means of *life* . . . [p. 452]
>
> A lure for our soul drawing her toward *life* is the joy that blossoms forth in the heart from hope. [p. 454]

MIND, UNDERSTANDING, INTELLECT In English the principal term for the mental faculty is *mind;* in formal writing *understanding* covers some of the same ground; while *intellect* has a much more restricted range of meaning. *Mind* can be used effectually and naturally in almost any context; *intellect* is inextricably associated with *intellectual,* and suggests inordinate influence by the realm of theory, idea, and abstract thought, aggravated by academic training. In the context of Saint Isaac's writings, *intellect* would be restricted to First Degree Knowledge (see Homily 52), the rational, discursive way of knowing that investigates, analyzes, and devises all by its own light and is even said by the Saint to be 'blameworthy and ... opposed not only to faith, but to every working of virtue' (p. 398).

Greek has *νοῦς* and *διάνοια*. Since *διάνοια* is etymologically derived from *νοῦς* and may be called the activity that is performed *by* or *through* (*διά*) the *νοῦς*, Greek has in effect one principal term also. Some common words for the working of the mind (*conception, thought,* etc.) are also derived from *νοῦς*, such as *κατανόησις, ἔννοια, νόημα.*

Syriac has three common and etymologically unrelated terms, *hauna, mad'a,* and *re'yana,* which for the most part Saint Isaac uses interchangeably.

A distinction is drawn by ascetical writers in general, and by Saint Isaac in particular, between the mind conceived of as reasoning and cogitating by its own powers, and the mind conceived of as directly apprehending spiritual realities not by drawing conclusions about them by its own workings, but by the inspiration of divine grace.

Given the existence of these two levels of the activity of the mind (among others), assigning words to mean one or the other level exclusively seldom fits idiomatic English usage. Moreover a close examination of the Syriac reveals that Saint Isaac uses *hauna, mad'a,* and *re'yana,* and other words besides, to mean both levels of activity (among others), and it is context, not the term used, that indicates which level is meant.

Comparison of the Greek translation shows the same flexibility in using *νοῦς, διάνοια,* and a variety of other terms such as *προαίρεσις* (volition), *ψυχή* (soul), and *λογισμός* (thought) to render *hauna,*

mad'a, and *re'yana* according to context rather than to pre-determined values.

In particular, artificially imposing on *intellect* a technical meaning that radically departs from English idiom, and employing it mechanically to translate *νοῦς* (or *hauna* or whatever it may be), is doomed to produce such stilted passages as

> When, however, no such occasion [*for showing mercy in active deed*] arises, we observe love and mercy toward the brethren in our intellects. [Homily 76, p. 529]
>
> ... the law of sin that fights against the law of our intellect. [*Philokalia*, Faber & Faber, Vol. I, p. 147]
>
> For who hath known the intellect of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the intellect of Christ. [1 Cor. 2:16]

Mind therefore is used in the homilies as the principal term for the mental faculty, with *understanding* as its auxiliary, context itself revealing what level of activity is to be understood. It is worth reiterating that with Saint Isaac it is much less the choice of term used, than the context itself, that defines what level of mental activity is intended. To give but one example, it might be expected that the magnificent Homily 52 would depend, for its definition of the Three Degrees of Knowledge, upon subtle distinctions among Syriac terms for the mental faculties, since it is with these that we associate knowledge. Yet the defining terms are not those for the mental faculties at all, but *body* (the First Degree), *soul* (the Second Degree), and *spirit* (the Third Degree).

MONK, SOLITARY We have generally translated *μοναχός* / *ihidaya* by 'monk,' occasionally by 'solitary.' The Greek and Syriac words properly mean 'one who lives alone,' 'a solitary,' but they were extended to include all monastics. Although Saint Isaac wrote this book chiefly for solitaries, that is, monks who dwell not in a monastery but alone, we think that to use the word 'solitary' throughout the text would excessively restrict the Saint's meaning.

MYSTERY The Syriac word so translated (which the Greek translators regularly render as *μυστήριον*) also has the meaning *type*, *likeness*, *figure*, *symbol*, and, like *μυστήριον*, the fundamental meaning of *secret*. We have followed the Greek translators in rendering it *mys-*

tery; but the reader might bear both meanings in mind while reading and might judge whether in such examples as the following *figure, type, likeness, symbol* could serve as well as *mystery:*

> The Lord's day is a *mystery* of the knowledge of the truth that is not received by flesh and blood, and it transcends conceptions. [p. 267]
>
> [*Spiritual prayer*] is the *mystery* of the future state and life. [p. 312]
>
> For even from now it has received, as it were in a *mystery,* the noetic resurrection ... [p. 399]
>
> Silence is a *mystery* of the age to come. [p. 467]

SCRIPTURE Saint Isaac very often writes about the reading of 'Scripture.' In English this word has come to mean the Bible and nothing else. In Greek and Syriac, however, this is not the case. We may recall Saint Peter's words, 'For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21). For the Church, 'Scripture' refers to the writings of all holy men who were moved by the Spirit: the Prophets, Apostles, and the holy Fathers. Therefore, by 'Scripture' Saint Isaac means both the Bible and the writings of the holy Fathers. On a few occasions it is evident from the context that he can only be speaking of the writings of the Fathers; here, to avoid confusion, we have used 'writings.'

STILLNESS We have rendered ἡσυχία / *shelya* by the word 'stillness,' following the usage in the new English *Philokalia.* In both Greek and Syriac this term means quietness of body and soul, which 'stillness' adequately conveys. Stillness is not just exterior silence, but a deep quietude of the inner man in which the tempest of the passions and the endless succession of thoughts have given way to a state in which the soul stands in the presence of God without distraction. It is used to signify both the inner spiritual state that is the end, and the outward way of life that is the means to that end.

THEORIA AND PRAXIS are transliterations of the Greek θεωρία and πρᾶξις. Although our English words *theory* and *practice* are etymologically related, they do not correspond to what ascetical writers mean by these terms. *Praxis,* usually rendered in this book as *righteous activity* (or *praxis*), comprises the working of virtue and doing of God's commandments, the performance of what is in our power to

do; *theoria*, or *divine vision*, is the activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul, giving it spiritual vision and understanding beyond the reach of human efforts. Together they constitute the co-working or synergy of man's efforts with God's grace, a paradigm universally invoked by ascetical writers. Sometimes they are translated as *action* and *contemplation*, though this latter term has been tinged with the connotations of pietism, self-induced visions, and worse.

It will be noted that these two stages of the spiritual life are implicit in the Three Degrees of Knowledge set forth in Homily 52: *praxis* corresponds to the Second Degree and *theoria* to the Third, and perhaps no better definition of *theoria* can be offered here than what Saint Isaac says of the Third Degree of Knowledge in Homily 52.

Syriac, like English, transliterates the Greek word θεωρία and Saint Isaac uses it in the way we have just defined for *theoria / divine vision*. Since it is not a native Syriac word, in Homily 37 he interprets it for his reader: '... *theoria*, which means "spiritual vision"' (p. 312). Therefore where the Syriac has the transliteration of θεωρία, *theoria* or *divine vision* is called for in our English version. But that does not mean the same for the Greek, because in Greek θεωρία can mean ordinary 'vision, sight' with no special connotations, as in

> The *sight* (θεωρία) of worldly people causes confusion in the soul that has renounced them for the sake of divine work. [p. 369]
>
> ... in order that a man's mind should not be harmed by *sight* (θεωρία), hearing, concern for worldly things ... [p. 445]

In passages where Greek has θεωρία but the Syriac has a word meaning ordinary *sight*, *vision* (as in the two citations above), then *sight* or *vision*, and not *divine vision*, is generally the correct translation of the Greek θεωρία.

Finally, we note that Saint Isaac identifies the 'consolation' mentioned in the Scriptures (e.g. 2 Cor. 1:5) with divine vision, that is, a gift from God in the form of spiritual knowledge and perception, as in Homily 74, p. 513 and Homily 77, p. 537.

Appendix D

Table of Homily Equivalences

English	Western Syriac	Eastern Syriac (Bedjan)	Ancient Greek	1770 Greek Printed Text (Theotokis)	Russian
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	30	2
3	3	3	3–4	82–83, 44–45	3–6
4	4	4	5	23	56
5	5	5	6	5	57
6	6	6	7	56	74
7	7	7	15	22	67
8	8	8	8	21	61
9	9	9	9	41	7
10	10	10	10	70	62
11	11	11	11	10	63
12	12	12	14	11	66
13	13	13	12	14	64
14	14	14	13	15	65
15	—	—	16	43	8
16	—	—	17	2	68
17	—	—	18	7	9
18	15	15	19	9	59
19	16	16	20	13	69
20	17	17	21	29	70
21	18	18	22	75–79	10–14
22	19	20–21	—	—	—
23	20	22	23	31–32	15–16
24	21	23	—	—	—

English	Western Syriac	Eastern Syriac	Ancient Greek	1770 Greek	Russian
25	22	24	—	—	—
26	23	25	26	67	17
27	24	26	—	—	—
28	25	27	27	84	18
29	26	28	28	74	19
30	27	29	—	—	—
31	—	—	29	80	20
32	28	30	24	42, 55	71
33	29	31	—	—	—
34	30	32	30	68	72
35	31	33	31	24	73
36	32	34	32	16	74
37	33	35	33	85	21
38	"	"	34	47	22
39	34	36	25	51–54	60
40	35–36	37–38	35	26	75–76
41	36	38	36	27	77
42	37	39	37	46	78–79
43	38	40	38	17	80–81
44	39	41	39	Epistle 1	23
45	40	42	40	Epistle 2	24
46	41	43	41	72	82–83
47	42	44	42	18	84
48	43–44	45–46	43	73	85
49	45	47	44	39–40	86–87
50	46	48	46	57	88
51	47	50	47–48	58, 60	89–90
52	48	51	49	62–65	25–28
53	49	52	53	66	29
54	50	53	54–55	33, 3	30–31
55	51	55	56	61	32

English	Western Syriac	Eastern Syriac	Ancient Greek	1770 Greek	Russian
56	52	57	58	25	91
57	53	58	59	37	34
58	54	64	57	59	33
59	55	59	60	4	35
60	56	60	61	36	36
61	57	61	62	48	37
62	58	62	63	38	38
63	59	63	64	35	39
64	60	65	65	34	40–41
65	61	66	66	Epistle 3	42
66	62–63	67–68	67	69	43
67	64	69	68	12	44
68	65	70	69	8	45
69	66	72	70	49	46
70	67	73	71	50	47
71	68	74	72	81	48
72	69	77	73	19	49
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